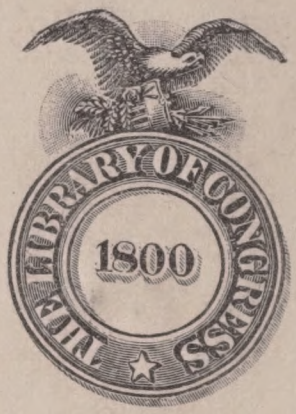

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MIDSUMMER MADNESS

BY

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CONTENTS.

Chapter		Page
I.	Mr. Haxtoun's Great Work	5
II.	A Looker-on in Vienna	14
III.	Table-talk	36
IV.	Mother and Son	48
V.	Medhurst	65
VI.	"Whistle Her Off and Let Her Down the Wind"	73
VII.	"Nothing, if not Critical"	81
VIII.	A Night in June	101
IX.	Mrs. Haxtoun's Troubles	119
X.	A Fourth-of-July Fête	131
XI.	Mrs. Dalton Takes a Morning Walk	166
XII.	"The Play's the Thing"	185
XIII.	"A Woman's Reason"	199
XIV.	Two Lovers	218

CHAPTER		PAGE
XV.	A STAR-CHAMBER MATTER . . .	232
XVI.	MR. HAXTOUN'S DIPLOMACY . . .	247
XVII.	A SONATA BY BEETHOVEN . . .	258
XVIII.	"FAIR RIVALS"	279
XIX.	RODNEY COMMITS HIMSELF TO FORTUNE	288
XX.	A PICNIC	298
XXI.	A SOIRÉE DRAMATIQUE	313
XXII.	TOO CLEVER BY HALF	324
XXIII.	"HAD I WIST BEFORE I KIST" . .	347
XXIV.	MEDHURST CUTS THE GORDIAN KNOT .	359
XXV.	A LOST OPPORTUNITY	372
XXVI.	CECIL COMES UP TO TOWN . . .	383

A MIDSUMMER MADNESS.

CHAPTER I.

MR. HAXTOUN'S GREAT WORK.

MR. FRANCIS MEDHURST had enjoyed so few chances of bettering his fortunes that when an opportunity for some little change of scene and freedom of action came knocking at his door he was half inclined to find something intrusive and impertinent in the summons. Mr. Hill, editor of the "Forum," a New York daily paper to which the young man was attached in a very subordinate capacity, sent for him, saying that, having been asked to recommend a secretary for a gentleman by the name of Haxtoun, living on the Delaware, he had named him, Medhurst. Good abilities, classical acquirements, a practical knowledge of German and habits of systematic energy, were the requirements. If found qualified in these respects the young fellow was to take up his residence with his patron, and assist to the utmost of his ability in preparing a work for the press. As for salary, Mr. Hastoun would make a fair offer to begin with, and, should his assistant prove competent and valuable, he was ready to pay almost any reasonable amount for the

sake of getting his book off his hands speedily and satisfactorily. The editor went on to remark that Medhurst was to call that day at the Brevoort House, between five and six o'clock, and conclude arrangements and terms with the gentleman himself.

"Do you actually think it would be worth while to give up my position here, and enter a servitude like that?" Medhurst asked, with an air of indignation.

"I should advise you to try it. It is your object, I believe, to get some few thousands ahead, and you have little chance of doing more than to cover your expenses here, while in the country your living will not cost you a stiver. Try it, at all events. I shall not fill your place for a few months, and if you can't stand it you may return and find a hearty welcome."

"What is the great work to be?"

"The subject is the epics of all nations, I believe. That does not sound so bad."

"I think it sounds very bad."

"Don't make yourself too great for occasions. You isolate yourself by your pride and your fastidiousness. That is one reason why I think this sort of an opening favorable to your interests; your silent contempt of journalism makes itself felt among us. You are too scrupulous, too ready to be disgusted at the merest trifle, — in fact, you're too much of an idealist. You're better fitted for literary life, and this experience will put you in the way of finding out your actual bias. Come, now, a hundred dollars a month, and your expenses paid, is not such an every-day sort of offer that you can afford to wear those airs of superiority. Go to the

Brevoort House, assume your best manner, and thank Heaven that you are in for a bit of honest good luck."

Medhurst was sensible enough to take this advice, although he liked neither the tone nor the matter of it. It would have pleased him to be independent of the common lot. If he could not act a striking part on the stage of the world he would have preferred to sit in the boxes, a critical or indifferent spectator. However, egoistic claims of an extravagant kind are not so unusual that the general system of the universe is overturned to make way for them, and so far in his career Medhurst had been compelled to obey puppet-strings of another man's pulling. He would have liked to humor his own vanity by pretending to hesitate over Mr. Haxtoun's offer; but then declared to himself that he was a fool, and accepted it at once. Like everything else that had happened to him for years, it was altogether remote from his actual scheme of life; but every man has a destiny allotted to him, and Medhurst had almost come to believe that his was to do nothing he had ever counted on.

The title of the great work on which his assistance was required turned out to be "The Identity of the Primitive Epic of all Aryan Nations." Such a subject covers a vast expanse of country, and so much of it was unexplored, and even unmapped for Medhurst, that he felt doubtful whether he could pass muster in Mr. Haxtoun's examination; but this he apparently contrived to do. The fact was, two other aspirants for the position had applied, each of whom had given the author pangs of morti-

fication and dread, and from whom he had escaped with thankfulness that he was in no way committed to their mercies. He had then applied to Mr. Hill, telling him that he wanted a well-educated young man, without prepossessions or violent conceit. He felt that it behooved him to be cautious, very cautious, and take Medhurst's measure thoroughly; but the fact was, that, moved by a fancy for him, he was not at the pains of considering anything beyond his personal advantages. What he saw was a well-made, sufficiently good-looking young man of twenty-eight, brown-haired, gray-eyed, with a crisp, dark mustache of the narrowest possible arch, giving a lighter character to the solidly moulded mouth and chin. His manner was attractive though unusually serious. He spoke without hesitation, but betrayed no inclination for an unnecessary word. Mr. Haxtoun thought him a peculiarly agreeable person to get along with. He liked gravity; he liked silence; he liked a man who knew how to listen. He was impressed, besides, by the half-brusque way with which Medhurst dismissed all questions of his individual likings and dislikings, apparently counting them as unimportant.

Medhurst, on the other hand, recognized in his patron a methodical and painstaking old gentleman of sixty-five, who invested the most trivial circumstance connected with himself with extreme portentousness. His taste was likely to have many nice distinctions; his instinct would be jealous; likely enough his habit would be rather inclined to petty tyrannies. But, after reading out about two score of questions committed to paper, and obtaining

decently satisfactory answers, Mr. Haxtoun relaxed a little. His delicate, thin face lost its anxious expression, took color, and expanded into something like geniality. The exigencies of his position had forced him to be inquisitive, and rather disagreeable, and he was glad to become apologetic, even flattering.

"You see, Mr. Medhurst," he now observed, "it was a very important matter, — the making of this engagement. It was not alone a question of your acquirements, but of your sympathy with me, — your probable insight into the workings of my mind. We shall be thrown into intimate companionship, and I cannot live with people I dislike, or who take a contradictory and critical attitude regarding me. You might possess every intellectual qualification, and yet hinder my work and paralyze my powers. I am a man of ardent imagination, yet at the same time I am sensitive, very sensitive. A breath of censure kills me. You are the third applicant for the position of my secretary. What I went through with the first is absolutely painful to consider. His name was Faber; he was a German, — a professor, I believe. He had gone over my whole field; but his views made me shudder. He sees in the 'Iliad,' even the 'Odyssey,' a mere pell-mell of fugitive ballads, flung together without coherence or cohesion. He insisted on piling up instances of the contradictions which he declares bristle along the pages from the eleventh to the eighteenth book of the 'Iliad.' I politely, but firmly, refused to listen. I rose. He went on reciting, almost foaming at the mouth. I went out and up to my room, and two flights above.

I still heard him shrieking out, '*The Hesiodic epic distinctly proves.*' I sent one of the waiters to show him the door, and tell him I should not require his services, and presently I watched him go up the street, still wildly gesticulating."

"I have heard of Faber. He is a monomaniac," said Medhurst; "but he is a man of profound research, I am told."

"I prefer making my own researches. The second aspirant was an old man, older than myself, a mere verbalist, with eyes bleared from looking into dictionaries. But what I wanted, and what I flatter myself I have secured, is a clever young fellow, whose ideas are not set in grooves, and whose imagination is not quenched."

Medhurst made some appreciative rejoinder, but would better have liked a compliment to his cool head and steady heart. Mr. Haxtoun, much relieved at having tided over his present difficulty, overflowed with garrulousness.

"My first idea," he pursued, "was to work independently from first to last. The matter of my book had lain in my mind for many a year. Publication did not at first seem a necessity of life to me, scarcely a laudable ambition, since I wanted no noisy *éclat*, no distinction from authorship. Gradually, however, I began to feel it was becoming my duty. The nature of my studies had roused expectations,—extravagant, no doubt, but still founded on the knowledge my friends have gained of my powers. I am constantly asked,"—here Mr. Haxtoun stopped a moment to utter a dry little laugh,—"how my great work is coming on. I hate to disappoint the world,

but the magnitude of my undertaking begins to loom before me alarmingly. I am in my sixty-seventh year; naturally I want to see it in print before I die. Mrs. Haxtoun has found my work a serious interference with some of her views: it keeps me away from her all day long; she declares it makes me dyspeptic sitting and brooding over my thoughts. Once, just to oblige her, I gave it up for three days; but, I assure you, Mr. Medhurst, deprived of my occupation I was worse off than Othello. In fact, with his jealous disposition, he was rich in resources compared with me." The old gentleman here paused to utter a faint "Ha! ha!" over his own wit. "My wife had to acquiesce," he continued. "She was compelled to let me go back. I then asked her to assist me, so that she need not be cut off from my society. But she wore upon my nerves. With the best intentions in the world she somehow damped my enthusiasm. She would find an illustration trivial which to me was luminous with meaning. She would pull me up while I was dictating by asking gently if what I was writing was not vague.

"This experience was dispiriting. It forced me to realize how solitary the great thinkers of the world necessarily are. My daughter has copied a great many manuscripts for me, and done some very pretty translations; but this does not suit my wife's idea for Cecil, who is at the age when amusements are important. We have a neighbor, who is rather an original man in his way, and he said to me, the other day, 'Get a secretary, Mr. Haxtoun; otherwise you will waste the rest of your life without finally accomplishing your object.' I decided to take Mr. Rod-

ney Heriot's suggestion, and I am prepared to say it was an excellent one."

Medhurst was not so prompt in committing himself to the most favorable view of his chances. The old gentleman might turn out a terrible bore, with his artless loquacity, in which every experience, thought, and sensation was diluted endlessly. He had, however, made a definite engagement, and was to set out the following afternoon with Mr. Haxtoun. Whatever weariness the position entailed, or labors it necessitated, it was certainly more lucrative than his present one, which barely kept him free of debt. One little circumstance both pleased and irritated Medhurst. Mr. Haxtoun urged, and even tried delicately to insist, that his new secretary should accept the first-quarter's payment in advance. Medhurst resented this with a haughty stare. The suggestion annoyed him, and when his thoughts recurred to it, afterwards, a wave of anger and shame passed over him, at the fancy that something of poverty in his appearance had led Mr. Haxtoun to make the proposal. The compensation was, that he was able to reflect that he stood, as he had always stood, fair and square with the world, and that, though sometimes closely pushed, he had never fallen behindhand, but had, indeed, kept something to the fore. There had been times when he had been in danger of debt, — when in early years he had been less free than at present from the pleasing superstition that he was ultimately to possess all he wanted; when, in order not to cut a bad figure, he had extravagantly drawn upon his few resources. Of late he had been more prudent. He had, indeed,

saved some money for a certain purpose. He owed nobody anything, except two columns to the editor of the "Forum." He wrote them up before midnight, and next morning corrected the final revise of a novel, which he was just about to publish. Then he packed his smallest trunk, and prepared to leave New York. He decided not to burn his boats behind him, and left many of his possessions in his landlady's care.

"I may want to come back in three months," he said to her.

CHAPTER II.

A LOOKER-ON IN VIENNA.

THE journey by rail lasted almost three hours, and Medhurst felt considerably better acquainted with his patron when he left the car than he had been when he entered it. Mr. Haxtoun had perhaps thought it well to break ground at once, and make the young man thoroughly acquainted with the unknown country he was about to enter. He began with generous autobiographical details: his falling in love with the present Mrs. Haxtoun, and their early married life. He gave a lively narrative of the first inception of his great idea of the Identity of the Aryan Epic, and his subsequent grappling with it; or rather, perhaps, the history of its usurpation of his mind and life. Mr. Haxtoun was, besides, a dyspeptic; and as dyspepsia was likely to be, as it had always been, a considerable factor in his moods, besides governing his capacities, it was probably as well to initiate the secretary into its symptoms, and the courses of treatment prescribed and carried out. The old gentleman had tried everything, — the fasting cure, the dieting cure, the milk cure, — but had now reached the vantage-land of scepticism towards all, with a gradually developing belief that the richest and

most highly seasoned food suited him best, and was, at any rate, the safest insurance for enjoyment of life. As a test of patience these confidences — which were curiously intermingled with accounts of his family circle, his wife, son, and daughter, and niece; one statement overlapping another and leading to perpetual repetitions — may have had their uses: they convinced the speaker that his victim could bear much without undue depression or excited rejoinder. Medhurst played the part of listener most engagingly, giving various, if vague, indications of interest while these coiled-up reminiscences were slowly unwound, neither shrinking from the recital nor seeming eager for its continuance. His adhesion to the idea of this sudden convulsion in his life was still so fresh that, except by momentary glimpses, he hardly yet realized where he stood. It crossed his mind, occasionally, that unless he contracted the warmest friendship for his patron he might, on closer acquaintance, find him insupportable; but at present he almost enjoyed these interminable harangues. For years, now, he had been incessantly goaded by the idea that the least of his experiences must be turned to account, must be served up, with more or less exaggeration, for readers of the "Daily Forum"; so now, having nothing to do save to listen, he yielded to a sense of passive content.

They left the cars a few miles from Philadelphia, and were met by an open wagon, which took them and their baggage to their place of destination. The drive lasted almost an hour; but on this pleasant afternoon, towards the end of May, it was a never-ending delight to Medhurst, whom the successive vistas into

park-like grounds on either hand, the sight of the tops of the trees against the sky, the very buttercups along the roadside, moved almost beyond his will. He liked his first glimpse of Rosendale, as Mr. Haxtoun's family-place was called; it looked substantial and venerable. Fine oaks and chestnuts were massed together here and there, or towered singly from an open glade. The house stood moderately high, with a sloping lawn in front, and terraces on the sides and at the rear. The building was of gray, unhewn stone, diversified with gables, turrets, and dormer windows. The north side was entirely covered with a luxuriant mantle of ivy, in the midst of which was a mediæval-looking latticed window, thrown wide open. At the sound of approaching wheels a tall girl, dressed in white, suddenly appeared at the casement, and leaned out with eager curiosity. She was smiling, and seemed about to utter a glad cry; but, meeting only Medhurst's glance, she merely gave a slight inclination of the head, and instantly vanished, leaving an impression on his mind of some scene in the Arabian Nights' Entertainments. When the wagon reached the steps she was standing in the door-way, beside a lady in a lilac dress, with a lace scarf on her head. They both came forward, and the girl ran to her father while he was still on the step, put her arms about his neck and kissed him, first on one cheek and then on the other.

"Gently, gently, my dear," said he. "Remember, I am only made of flesh and blood. This is my daughter Cecil, Mr. Medhurst," he added.

Cecil barely looked at the young man, but with a

little nod put her arm inside her father's, and led him up to Mrs. Haxtoun. Medhurst was not, however, left out in the cold. In fact, neither wife nor child seemed, at present, to the old gentleman, so distinct a boon from Heaven as this stiff young secretary he had brought home. He introduced him to his wife with a glow of positive enthusiasm; called up his son Alec, and presented him, adding that he wanted every possible attention offered to this new acquisition. Alec was nothing loth; he began talking at once, in no way rebuffed by the cool way in which Medhurst met his advances, and finally proposed to show him his room, leading the way upstairs, hospitably throwing open the shutters and putting back the curtains.

"I dare say you will come down when you feel like it," Alec then remarked. "We take tea at eight, you know."

"I will be down in five minutes," Medhurst said, answering for the first time by more than a single word.

"There is your trunk coming up. Well, all right." Alec seemed, however, reluctant to go, and now burst into a laugh.

"You see," he explained, "I feel quite upset by the sight of you. I expected a rusty, musty old fellow."

"That precisely describes me."

"We were talking to Heriot about what you were likely to be. After the picture he drew it seems delightful to realize that you are a being of flesh and blood."

Medhurst gave a shrug. It was difficult for him

to see the humorous side of the subject. He had evidently been well laughed at before he came, and that might be only the beginning of his making amusement for a group of young people.

"We shall find you a great addition," said Alec, returning to his good manners. "We are dull and monotonous, but we will do our best for you."

He went out, and, left alone at last, Medhurst glanced about his room, which was to his perceptions so dainty, so refined, so feminine-looking, that he felt certain he should never be able to use its appurtenances freely. Chintz, ribbons, and lace overhung the toilet; curtained windows, doors, and recesses screened the bath, and made a canopy for the bed. Every variety of easy-chair stretched out its arms to draw him to its cushioned depths. The least want had been provided for; in fact, the superfluity of equipment suggested wants and needs for which he cared nothing, and of which he had hitherto known nothing, but now his very ignorance and indifference made him in his own eyes crude and uncivilized.

"A pretty time I shall have of it here, stumbling into pitfalls at every step!" he said to himself. He went to the window and looked out at the river and hills beyond. So far he had only seen the waters of the Delaware by glimpses, and the scene towards sunset struck him as indescribably pretty and picturesque. It inspired, however, a feeling of absolute melancholy,—the sort of melancholy he might have experienced if what he loved best in the world were shut away from him by these horizons. He repented coming, and wished himself away. "A

pretty time I shall have in this house," he said, again staring at the reflection of the sunset clouds in the river. He felt indignant towards Mr. Hill and towards all the Haxtouns for forcing him into these changed currents of existence. "I was well enough off in New York," he now said aloud, as if ready to argue the matter with some unseen antagonistic force. Nevertheless, while he uttered this, the thought suddenly occurred to him that it had been a joyless life enough he had led in New York. He remembered how the young girl's head had looked framed in the ivy-hung casement.

It crossed his mind presently that time was passing, and that he might be expected downstairs. He was angry with himself for a sort of trembling; not so much a trembling as an after-quivering of the nerves left by over-excitement. But what could have excited him? He declared to himself that, after bolting his meals for four years in cheap eating-houses, he dreaded the ordeal of a private table. He was in doubt as to the propriety of making a change in his dress, and, remembering the elegant nicety of Alec Haxtoun, he longed to be rough and careless. Nevertheless, he set about his toilet with the most fastidious pains, although his thoughts chafed restlessly all the time, impugning his motives and condemning his weakness.

Meantime the group on the veranda had not moved.

"He is what I call a gentleman," Mr. Haxtoun had been saying. "He has pleased me better and better each hour since we met. He lost his parents early, and whatever small patrimony he had was

spent on his education. He had expected to study law, but was compelled to do something for himself as soon as he left the University."

"And this was promotion to him!" exclaimed Mrs. Haxtoun. "He could have had little enough success elsewhere. I suppose you will hardly give him more than a few hundred dollars a year."

"The terms are not precisely fixed," said Mr. Haxtoun, a little hurt at the tone his wife was taking. She seemed, he thought, to exhibit an excessive and obtrusive surprise at the appearance of the young man, — a surprise disproportionate to the occasion. She had declared that he looked young; that he did not impress her as she had expected to be impressed by a mere secretary. She had added, too, that he was very well dressed. If there could have been any reason for it he might have fancied there was something displeasing to her in youth, good looks, and respectable clothes.

"Really, Leonard," she now said, almost with vehemence, "I should suppose that any young man of good education, and even moderate energy, could get a better place than this."

"I mean that he shall find it a very good place, my dear."

"But, Leonard, if you thought of doing anything extravagant, ought you not to reflect"—

Mr. Haxtoun rose. "I will go in," said he. "I will go to my own room, and have a little fire made in the grate. I feel myself taking cold here in the dampness."

Mrs. Haxtoun sprang towards her husband at once. She was conscious of having betrayed some

irritation, instead of giving him a warm, wifely greeting. But then it seemed to her a very singular indiscretion for Mr. Haxtoun to have brought home a young and very good-looking man to make a new member in their household. She had rather inclined to the idea of a secretary, for her husband had constantly interfered with Cecil's amusements and occupations, by asking one little service of her after another; but the secretary she had seen in her mind's eye had in no way resembled Medhurst. He had been of no particular age, near-sighted, bent, narrow-chested, shy and awkward in his manners. She had not begrudged him one of her pretty spare chambers; but she had considered it too good for him nevertheless. She would have been very kind to a weak-looking, bashful man, even if he had been young; but towards Medhurst she felt a singular hostility. He ought never to have been brought to Rosendale without her advice being asked. But then, Mr. Haxtoun never did ask her advice. He never coarsely rejected it; but he never seemed conscious that she had independent views to offer. He seemed to take it for granted that, because she was his dutiful wife, she agreed with him on every subject, and that the most strenuous elucidation of his private opinions was a mere amplification of his own, and any difference was feminine error.

But the idea that he had taken cold now roused her liveliest solicitude, and other complications were lost sight of in view of this present evil.

"O my dear!" she exclaimed, "where do you feel it? How could I have been so thoughtless! Is it all over you, or in your head?"

"My throat, I think," said Mr. Haxtoun, with feeble resignation. "I ought not to have sat down with you young people. You are always forgetting that I am an old man."

"You must take a hot drink when you go to bed."

"It will be too late to undo the mischief then," said Mr. Haxtoun, shaking his head mournfully.

"You shall have one now."

"That would simply prevent my having any appetite for my supper."

By this time husband and wife were half way up the stairs, and on the landing encountered Medhurst.

"Ah, Mr. Medhurst," said Mrs. Haxtoun, in a tone of the most exquisite politeness, "you must make yourself quite at home! We must leave you to the young people for the present. Alec will show you about. We have kept Mr. Haxtoun so long on the piazza that he has caught a chill."

"I trust nothing of consequence," said Medhurst.

"I will take a quinine pill," answered Mr. Haxtoun, in a tone of doom, and, waving his hand as if in blessing, he vanished.

Medhurst went slowly down the stairs, lingering as long as possible on each one, finally standing still at the lowest, and awaiting developments.

"Oh, I say, Cis," cried Alec, "here is Mr. Medhurst! I am glad you have come down. Tea is not ready yet; in fact I hear that it is put off. Nothing is so movable as the feasts in this house when you are hungry, and nothing so relentless and

immovable when you want them a little late. They are always either too early or too late."

Both the young people had come up to Medhurst in the hall, and on the threshold of the door now appeared a very blond and graceful young girl, in a dark-green dress, attended by a saturnine-looking young man.

"This is my cousin, Miss Winchester, Mr. Medhurst," said Cecil. "And let me introduce Mr. Arthur Snow, also."

Miss Winchester shot a very bright glance at the new secretary, but Mr. Snow regarded him with apparent hostility; but then, Mr. Snow perhaps had a sort of grudge against the world in general, for the sight of most things under the sun increased his look of *ennui* and melancholy. The two, having gratified their curiosity, remarked that they were going to walk again, bowed, and withdrew.

"My cousin has incessant occupation at present," remarked Alec, "having the care of a" —

Cecil flung her brother a look expressive of horror.

"They are engaged," she put in. "They are to be married in the autumn."

"Do you suppose Mr. Medhurst cares anything about that, Cis?" asked Alec, in a pitying tone. "Girls," he went on, "like to hear about weddings, and to talk about them, because it reminds them of the happy time when they shall be brides; while a man hates all mention of them, for fear that, sooner or later, his time may come."

"I am entirely unmoved either by expectation or dread," said Medhurst.

"Did the place strike you pleasantly as you drove in?" Alec asked presently, breaking a stiff pause.

"Yes; I never saw in this country such fine ivy."

"The climate favors it. It is milder here than in New York."

Medhurst declined to discuss climates. He stood looking from one to the other of the young people with an attentive gaze. The stillness again began to be appalling, and discomfited Cecil, who now remarked shyly, "Our place is quite old;" then added, "Alec, tell Mr. Medhurst about our place, — how old it is, and all that."

Her face as she spoke grew excessively arch, although she was apparently speaking with absolute seriousness.

Alec caught the tone at once.

"The Haxtouns have lived here for one hundred and sixty years," said he.

"Indeed?"

"The old house bears the date of 1717," put in Cecil, with the candid air of a child.

"This house?"

"No, this house was built in 1832 by my grandfather. The old house is on the lowest terrace, close to the river. The ceilings are so low I can touch them with my hand by standing on my tiptoes. The windows are very small and the glass very old and green, but we value it because on one of the panes is written, with a diamond, 'Peace, hush this dismal din of arms. Jan. 19, 1777.'"

"Indeed?" Medhurst said again.

"It was supposed to be written by my great-great-aunt, who had a lover in the war," she

added. "Don't you think it rather interesting?"

"Very," Medhurst remarked, his tongue too stiff to yield a word more. He saw clearly that, although his entertainers showed kindness and consideration, they found something distinctly humorous in the situation, a something that had no precedent in their traditions. Cecil fastened her lovely, frightened eyes upon him, much as if he had been a unique animal, and she in doubt how to coax his humors. All he cared for at present was to hold his own. He was perfectly self-possessed, and studied both the young Haxtouns as critically as the occasion permitted. Cecil's beauty was undeniable. Being only nineteen, she had, besides beauty, the indescribable freshness and charm of early youth. Beyond this there was an unusual degree of high finish in the moulding of both form and features, which promised still greater perfection when a few years of womanhood should have developed her. All this he could see; but whether her eyes were blue or brown; whether with that dark hair and dazzlingly fair skin she was to be classed with brunettes or with the medium type, he could not at present decide. Whatever might be the color of her eyes their expression varied bewilderingly from the caressing to the mocking, the timid to the imperious. At the beginning of her speech they pleaded, they enticed; at its close they laughed. Her mouth, too, was lovely as a child's, and whenever she opened her lips her smile had an actual cherubic charm; but the innocence and candor grew into the sweetest mischief and waywardness, and one's heart, at first warmed by her air

of goodness, burned presently with a sense of being duped and tantalized. She was tall, and appeared taller than her actual height, from the straightness and slimness of her pretty figure. The gown she wore was of thick, fluffy white, with full frills of yellow lace at the throat and elbows, which gave the effect of her blossoming out of it like a flower out of a deep corolla.

As for Alec he was twenty-three or four, with an air of holding serious views concerning his toilet and behavior. He aimed at being correct, and rather colorless; but his spirit was too high to allow of his making a definite impression of mere elegance. There was, indeed, rather a spoiled-child air about both young people, which might easily be forgiven on account of their perfect good-nature and love of innocent fun. Medhurst made up his mind he could easily enough like Alec; but, as for the pretty, princess-like creature, he invested her at once with aristocratic *hauteur*, whims, and caprices, which separated her from him like a being of a different world.

"Alec!" Cecil exclaimed, in a tone of indignation, "papa told you to offer Mr. Medhurst every attention. I insist that you shall show him the house at once."

"Don't, I beg, take any trouble to entertain me," said Medhurst, dryly.

"Oh, we are charmed to do it!" cried Alec.

"Papa told us he wanted you to feel quite at home," said Cecil, "and that we must do all in our power to make it agreeable to you. We are stupid, but our intentions are good." She accompanied

these words with the upturned glance of an affectionate child; but Medhurst bit his lip.

"This is the parlor," said Alec, advancing along the hall, and indicating the *salon* at the left.

"The drawing-room," corrected Cecil. "You don't make anything impressive, Alec. I will do the honors myself." She ran on ahead, and stood at the wide-arched door with a charming gesture of invitation. "This is the Haxtoun drawing-room," said she. "It runs the length of the house, and has eight French windows and two doors. It is furnished in frayed yellow satin, and carpeted with an afflicting pattern in Axminster, which, after forty years of constant use, will not wear out. The works of art on the wall are by — Who are the works of art on the wall by, Alec?" she asked, looking at her brother and going off into a fit of girlish laughter. "Are you æsthetic, Mr. Medhurst?" she asked, suddenly growing grave and drawing herself up.

"Not in the least," Medhurst replied, softening a little at the sight of her wistful face. If she had been more of a child or more of a woman he might, he thought, have known better how to take this prodigality of spirits and this high coloring of fun and folly.

"We are not æsthetic," she now remarked. "We have neighbors whose houses look as if they were furnished out of the South Kensington Art Museum. Accordingly we pose as Philistines; we make no concessions to new ideas, — not we! What we like in a thing is its durability, its respectability, its ugliness. We don't have furniture and cups

and saucers to look at! What we pique ourselves upon is the utter absence of taste in our house. It costs a great deal to keep up to our standard of hideousness, for almost everything nowadays is so pretty and so cheap. In this way we stand up against the encroachments of our rich neighbors. You should see Mrs. Esté's pictures" —

"China," said Alec.

"Crystal, and glass, and damask" —

"Carvings and furniture" —

"Rugs, Japanese bronzes" —

"And her clothes!"

"She sits among her splendors with the smile of a Cornelia," pursued Cecil; "for her chief treasure is her son."

"Oh, such a son!" said Alec. "He is as dutiful as — one of Lear's daughters!"

"I wonder if you will like Mr. Heriot," said Cecil, turning to Medhurst. "He is rather — distinguished, — does that suit Mr. Heriot, Alec?"

"I never heard an adjective yet that expressed him."

Medhurst was looking at Cecil and smiling, and she ceased to think of what she was saying, or to listen to her brother. She turned away from his gaze with a wish to say something to hide a sort of feeling she could not express; but could think of no words, except mere commonplaces about the parlor, where they still stood.

"It is a very pleasant room in summer," she went on, with quite a shy air. "In winter we live altogether on the south side of the house. This is mamma's morning-room, and that is the library.

Alec, take Mr. Medhurst into papa's book-room. You will be apt to spend a good deal of your time there," she added, crossing before Medhurst, in order to allow him a chance to go on, and sending a little smile up into his eyes as she passed him.

Alec took the lead, though the library was so dark that they could only see their way into a small oblong room, completely lined with books, except for the three windows which opened to the south and west.

"This apartment is sacred to THE WORK," said Alec, in a voice expressive of intense veneration. "Every book in those five tiers relates to the Aryan epics. As you see, we mention the subject with genuflections and with bated breath."

Medhurst began to understand Mr. Haxtoun's need of a paid secretary.

"In those cabinets," pursued Alec, "are pots, pans, and jars, which will, we suppose, illustrate THE WORK."

"Aren't they hideous?" said Cecil, peering into the shelves over her brother's shoulder.

Medhurst was unaware that the young girl had followed them into the book-room, and now, startled by her sudden exclamation, turned sharply and met her face close to his. Thus seen, blushing and dimpling, she made so vivid a picture that he hardly knew what he said or did for the few succeeding moments. Having introduced him to the scene of his future labors both the young people became frankly familiar. Cecil prompted Alec to tell all sorts of fantastic freaks to which they had forced their father's great undertaking to lend itself. They

both bubbled over with glee, humoring each other by every variety of childish reminiscences. It was unnecessary for Medhurst to take any part in the game save that of indulgent listener. He had begun by being somewhat annoyed, but he ended by being amused. There were both sweetness and seductiveness in Cecil: her face took a fresh meaning every moment; she might be arch, she might be satirical, but she was bewitching. She alternately turned to him with the clear pose of a woman of the world and with an artless smile. Beginning by a sort of autobiographical sketch, which linked itself with the various processes of her father's great idea, the help she had given him through numerous difficulties, she finally entered upon the subject of his present advantages in having secured such a secretary. She actually had the audacity to rally Medhurst himself.

"I know very well that you are a universal genius," she remarked, with mischievous ease. "Papa said he examined you on every subject, and touched bottom nowhere."

Medhurst glanced at Miss Haxtoun, then looked away.

"You are, I believe, a regular cosmopolitan, a citizen of the world," she went on. "You have lived everywhere."

"Exactly."

"I thought so. It is so delightful to think you have done everything. We are narrow and provincial. — regular Philistines, as I was just saying. But you are like Mr. Rodney Heriot, — at home anywhere between the poles and the equator; can dine

on rice or whale-blubber; wear sandals or snow-shoes. But, dear me, how tame and uninteresting you will think us!"

Medhurst hardly knew whether to be enraged or to break out laughing. Accordingly he smiled grimly and held his tongue.

"We are terribly dull," she pursued vaguely. "We live so near town that it never seems worth while to go to town. It is always too wet or too dry, too hot or too cold, or some of our relations are sick or dead. We stay here all the year round, see nothing, hear nothing, do nothing, — except Alec, of course. He belongs to the actual world. He mixes in the excitements of real life. He goes into town every morning at nine, and does not return until three o'clock. He is an eminent lawyer."

"I'm too eminent," Alec struck in. "One of the Haxtouns of Rosendale, people say, and nobody thinks of giving me a brief. Nobody has a chance to find out my consummate cleverness, and it is taken for granted that my legal studies are an elegant fiction, an apology for indolence. What I pine for is to roll up my sleeves and go to work and make some money; but I can only" —

"Roll cigarettes," suggested Cecil.

Both laughed as at some unique witticism. They had left the book-room, and were standing on the back piazza, and here, on the river-side, were charming vistas opening to the banks of the Delaware. They walked down the path to the shore. Sunset was over; but a few blushing, translucent clouds still floated over the gold and amber of the west, and, reflected in the river, showed the track of a passing

boat, a trembling, fluctuating wake of rose and flame. The old house stood but little above the water's edge ; it was covered with luxuriant creepers, but looked dark and deserted. Between the cottage and the river were two gravelled terraces, one above the other, each bordered with rows of white lilacs now in full bloom. Medhurst hardly knew himself. The dreamy hour, the charming views on either hand, the lilac scents, the illusion of easy, sympathetic companionship, made him dread his own pleasurable sensations. The walk was wide enough for three, and he paced along by Miss Haxtoun's side, listening to her, and occasionally putting in a word.

"Rodney Heriot is coming to tea," Alec said suddenly.

"You ought to go in, then!"

"Heriot is likely to surprise you," Alec remarked, turning to Medhurst.

"Is he a young man?"

"No; not to say young. He is probably thirty-five."

"He seems to me older than that," said Cecil. "He has done so many things. He is like a person who gets up early in the morning and accomplishes everything, then has a long stupid afternoon left on his hands."

"What Heriot has not done," said Alec, with a suggestive look at Medhurst, "is not worth doing."

"Yet you call your neighborhood tame and uninteresting?"

"His mother lives here, and he is visiting her. She was married twice, and he was the son of her

first husband. She lost her second a year or more ago. Heriot arrived in March, and had no intention of staying; but he has not gone away, nor do I think he is likely to go."

Medhurst had finally gained one distinct impression. It was that Heriot was in love with Miss Haxtoun. Everything else was vague, but this was clear.

For some reason, more or less occult, Medhurst felt at once in more harmonious relations with his surroundings. He was anxious to see Heriot, and observe his manner to this lovely, imperious, and rather bewildering Miss Haxtoun. He said to himself that he would make the utmost of his present experiment, as an opportunity for social observation. He had already written a novel, and had at times been impelled to pause, and wish that he had more ample knowledge of what was going on in the gay world whose follies he was so ready to deride. He could now become a looker-on, without rôle or phrases of his own, and could study the habits and characteristics of the choicest specimens of youth and beauty.

At this moment Rodney Heriot approached the party of young people. He went straight up to Cecil, to whom he bowed, without offering his hand; and she, for the first time since Medhurst had seen her, wore an air of constraint, drew herself to her full height, and seemed in a freezing mood.

"How are you, Heriot?" said Alec. "Let me introduce you and Mr. Medhurst to each other."

"Is it the new secretary?" asked Rodney Heriot.

"I am the new secretary," Medhurst returned.

The two looked at each other with some curiosity.

They were the same height, but Rodney Heriot looked the taller, as he was excessively slight, and his figure was rather ill-proportioned. He was, nevertheless, a striking-looking man, with a commanding air and a peculiarly expressive face. He had large blue eyes, a thin, sensitively outlined mouth, and his skin was delicate as a girl's. His face beardless, without even a mustache, and his pale brown hair was scanty. He gave the impression of a versatile and doubtful personality. His eyes puzzled and annoyed any one inclined to make him a study. They were at times hard, cold, and relentless; again, clear and frank: they could soften and brighten, and darken too. But his whole face suggested as much whim as intellect, and his habitual manner was that of one whose individuality is aggressive, and allows few encroachments from others.

"So you are the spirit I called from the vasty deep," he said to Medhurst. "I told Mr. Haxtoun he needed a secretary. Do you feel grateful to me?"

"Not in the least," returned Medhurst. "I am not an amphibious animal, and feel out of my element entirely."

They had shaken hands, but still looked at each other as if deepening their mutual impression.

"Now, look here," said Rodney Heriot, in a light, easy tone; "having evoked you I must know the secret of you. What is your name and age and station?"

"I am twenty-eight years old. My name is Francis Medhurst. My station is as you see."

They both laughed.

"I must find out more than that," said Rodney. "Do you remember the fate of the wizard's servant, who discovered the secret of incantation and raised a demon, but knew not how to dismiss him?"

They both laughed again.

"What was that?" inquired Alec, who was a little puzzled by the dialogue.

"It was a sad story," said Rodney. "The moral is, that a man ought to let well enough alone."

It had grown suddenly darker. A summons to tea came from Mrs. Haxtoun, and Rodney Heriot offered his arm to Cecil. She declined it, and walked on ahead, looking very tall and slight as she mounted the terraces flitting towards the lighted house. The three men followed, Alec doing most of the talking. All the color had withdrawn out of the sky; not a flower showed; a chilly wind came up from the river.

CHAPTER III.

TABLE-TALK.

THERE were eight at the tea-table, which was lighted by twelve candles, in high silver candlesticks. Rodney Heriot took the chair at Mrs. Haxtoun's right hand, and Cecil sat on his other side. Medhurst's place was between Mr. Haxtoun and Miss Winchester. The old gentleman had apparently recovered from his unfavorable symptoms of an hour before. He had spent the time giving his wife an elaborate detailed account of his doings during his six days' absence. He had, it seemed to him, accomplished his purpose in a masterly manner, and he wanted her assurance of this; he had set out to prove that he had not only avoided all the dangers he had foreseen, but had warded off those unexpected and intrusive difficulties which defy prediction, turning up at every corner and threatening accident and vexation. His wife had ended by showing the most amiable spirit of obedience and acquiescence. However shaken might be her views of her husband's far-seeing knowledge of the world, there was in him a fatal facility for explanation, for argument, for careful balancing of expediencies, which forced her to succumb. Ever since her marriage, Mrs. Haxtoun had intended to have her

own way; but the occasion when she should do so was still a matter requiring prophetic conjecture. She disliked the country; yet she lived in the country all the year round. She had wished to go abroad after Cecil was through her studies; but she had not gone abroad. Her anxiety was that Cecil should make a desirable marriage, and just at this moment, when Mr. Rodney Heriot was beginning to show unmistakable matrimonial intentions, Mr. Haxtoun had introduced a young man into the house, as if with the very design of giving Cecil an opportunity for capricious conduct, fluctuating feelings, and, possibly, romantic flights of fancy. Every woe of her life, Mrs. Haxtoun said within her own mind, was part of an Aryan epic. Her husband's great work met her at every turn, tormenting, defying, denying; yet it was impossible for her to make him understand this. It was not in Mrs. Haxtoun's nature to be dictatorial or strenuous. A woman, she believed, should conquer by renunciation and self-sacrifice; she should yield with such grace that chivalrous man would be eager not only to reinstate her, but offer her ampler powers and wider scope. She would rather never have her way than not be kneeled to and made the object of a hand-kissing devotion. But, nevertheless, Mrs. Haxtoun wanted her own way, and never more than now, when Mr. Rodney Heriot sat between her and Cecil, and made each the object of his little attentions. Mrs. Haxtoun accepted them with easy, smiling grace. Cecil seemed unconscious of them. It had before now impressed Mrs. Haxtoun that Cecil failed to appreciate the fascinations of her suitor. He was self-possessed,

observant, and did everything in good taste, and he was, besides, a capital talker. He had had plenty of experiences, and was willing to use them to give a piquant or amusing turn to conversation; but he never lost a certain tone; he said nothing with too much emphasis; he never insisted on his hearers being monopolized by his ideas. In short, to Mrs. Haxtoun's mind he was perfect in every-day intercourse; so different from Mr. Snow, her niece's *fiancé*, who took himself seriously, and even if he had a theory concerning the change of weather was apparently under the painful pressure of a tremendous idea. Mrs. Haxtoun liked a man who could be free on occasions of himself, — throw self and its limitations away. She had perhaps suffered from the opposite characteristics.

"It is a singular coincidence," Mr. Haxtoun remarked, the moment the dish-covers were taken off, "that when I am especially hungry everything offered should be of the most unwholesome description. Now, of all things to give a worn-out traveller, devilled crabs are the worst" —

"My dear Leonard," cried Mrs. Haxtoun, "you told me you had dined; and there are cold tongue and some delicious cream-toast, and" —

"But they would never satisfy me, my dear Jenny. I crave something highly seasoned, and at the same time simple and substantial."

"The devilled crabs are just the thing," said Rodney Heriot, "with a little of that asparagus and *mayonnaise*."

"I'm afraid you are joking," remarked Mr. Haxtoun, with mild disapproval. "Young men do not

regard these matters as important. Ah, Sarah, what is on that platter across the table?"

"It is cold salmon," cried Mrs. Haxtoun, with dismay. "I did not want you to see this, Leonard; you know it always hurts you."

"Under some circumstances it might do so, but hardly to-night," said Mr. Haxtoun, who liked salmon *mayonnaise*. "My dinner, as you call it, Jenny, was a mere lunch of cutlets and spinach. The cutlets must have been underdone; they have distressed me ever since. I ought never to eat veal away from home; but the fact is, my dear, you never have it on the table here."

"You know very well why. You observe," said Mrs. Haxtoun to her next neighbor, "my husband's diet is governed by fancy, and experience does nothing for him."

"I make it a point to regard the food before me with a frank and friendly feeling, rather than a cold, suspicious one," said Heriot.

"Treachery often lurks under an innocent-looking dish-cover," remarked Mr. Haxtoun, mournfully. "It is my profound conviction that the proper kind of food for human beings has not yet been invented."

"The old lady drinks *bouillon*," said Rodney Heriot, who thus alluded to his mamma. "She takes it the first thing in the morning, all through the day, and the last thing at night. I'm not sure but what her maid wakes her up to give it to her every two hours."

"I dare say I shall come to beef-tea and to gruel, also, a little later," said Mr. Haxtoun, rather testily.

"We all shall," put in Rodney. "I relish a thousand simple, innocent things I never expected to. When I first came the old lady used to have elaborate dinners for me; but I put an end to that. I eat a chop and a couple of vegetables, a dish of *macaroni*, and a sprig of celery, at three o'clock."

"You have the most absolute *savoir-vivre*," said Mrs. Hastoun.

"Have I? I am not so sure about that. There are signals posted all along a man's course, — not too much. One pulls up a little naturally at these warnings, — when one is not hungry. I used to like turtle-soup, a truffled *filet*, and a bottle of iced *clicquot*. Now I am in love with simple pastoral pleasures, — nectar, ambrosia."

"What are nectar and ambrosia?" asked Cecil.

"Something delicious," returned Rodney Heriot.

"Made of cream and sugar?"

"It must be very unhealthy," said Mr. Haxtoun. "Sweet things ruin the constitution."

"Mr. Heriot is talking figuratively, my dear," cried Mrs. Haxtoun. "He was alluding to simple pastoral pleasures" —

"Making hay while the sun shines," said Alec.

"Hay-making will soon be obsolete," remarked Mr. Haxtoun. "Ensilage is a much better system."

"Oh, please, my dear, do not talk to us about ensilage."

"But, Jenny, it is an invention of great value, not only to the agriculturist, but to sufferers like myself from hay-fever."

"Hay-fever?" said Rodney Heriot.

"Everybody except Mr. Haxtoun likes the smell

of new-mown hay," struck in Mrs. Haxtoun, nervously. She had a high ideal of what table-talk should be. Here was the prettiest and most elegant of tables,— crystal, china, silver, damask, all most dainty and exquisite. Nothing was lacking except airy and agreeable talk, wit and badinage; but how was even the cleverest of hostesses to contrive this, when the host had a way of seizing the lightest soap-bubble of allusion, and converting it into a heavy missile, which came back with depressing effect?

"Mrs. Haxtoun always pretends not to believe in hay-fever," said her husband, with a painful smile, "although I have been a victim to it for forty years. I assure you, Mr. Heriot, it is a form of martyrdom occasioning acute suffering, although it wins scant sympathy. The moment the grass is cut in the neighborhood all my nasal mucous membrane" —

"Yes, yes, dearest Leonard, I know how you suffer," said Mrs. Haxtoun, soothingly; "but" —

"Smell — respiration through the usual air-passages — becomes difficult; tears stream" —

"I know, I know," murmured Mrs. Haxtoun.

"By all means let us have ensilage," said Rodney Heriot. "Such woes make ordinary hay too dear."

"What is ensilage?" asked Cecil.

"I don't know, Miss Haxtoun. Is it not enough to satisfy you that it will lighten the sum of human misery?"

"It seems a deuced pity," said Mr. Snow, with deep emphasis, "that everything time-honored, picturesque and poetic should be" — He paused and fumbled for a word.

"Banished, Edgar," murmured Miss Winchester, apprehending the critical condition of his struggling idea, which could not entirely break its shell.

"So to speak — banished. Now, formerly, there were the mowers and their scythes, — regular old Father Times, you know."

"And now they have mowing-machines instead," said Miss Winchester, brightening visibly at her clear perception of her lover's meaning.

"And before long the grass will be whisked off without even falling to the ground, and there won't be an atom of" — Mr. Snow, whose eloquence was spasmodic, was lost again.

"Poetry; no 'midsummer when the hay was down'; nothing but tame, stupid prose," finished Miss Winchester, realizing that they were emerging from the ordeal with *éclat*.

"Often eighteen and twenty handkerchiefs a day," Mr. Haxtoun was now heard to say, having struggled manfully against difficulties and secured a listener in Medhurst. "A perpetual tendency to"—

Mrs. Haxtoun breathed more freely. Medhurst was listening to his employer with an air of absorbed attention, and she began to realize that some compensation might exist for her in the general scheme of things. If Mr. Haxtoun were to find a congenial companion in his secretary, — in other words, an apparently admiring listener, — the average of domestic joy at Rosendale might be considerably increased. It would be, in fact, Medhurst's duty to listen to Mr. Haxtoun, whether he discussed Aryan epics or his indigestions. He could listen, too, without any feeling that he was doing his patron a wrong.

A wife must beware of helping to build up preposterous illusions in her husband's mind of his being a more momentous and interesting person than he really is; yet at the same time she must not venture to hint at the most obvious oversight in his views, or in any way to be in the right herself. His confident assertions of the erroneous must be cautiously met with by her "Don't you think," or, "But if"—and other expedients of the nicest tact, and the most delicate evasions. But Medhurst need not be too conscientious; he need not insist on the formal agreement of his private premises and Mr. Haxtoun's conclusions. He was paid for the work, and need not stick at obstacles in the way. Insensibly the cloud lifted from Mrs. Haxtoun's pretty brow, and when she led the way into the parlor, and arranged the whist-table, she felt almost grateful to the chance which had brought a young fellow like Medhurst to the house. He could play whist with his patron; and for Mr. Haxtoun to have a partner at whist who was neither his wife, nor his son, nor his daughter, was a solid gain of comfort.

Medhurst was nothing loth. He liked the look of the long, pleasant room, full of easy-chairs and wide, roomy sofas; but he would have felt oppressed if he had been forced to sit down without other occupation than to watch and listen to the groups. He took his seat opposite the old gentleman at the whist-table, congratulating himself that at last the eternal flow of disputations must pause,—whist was, at least, a silent game. Miss Winchester and Mr. Snow were the other partners. Mrs. Haxtoun sat down with her work at a table near, with a shaded

lamp, and Cecil took a stool at her feet. Mr. Heriot watched everybody's else movements before disposing of himself, and stood at the mantel-piece looking at a photograph of Cecil, taken when she was a little girl of ten. Alec, who admired the guest and longed to be intimate with him, hovered about, but found Heriot by no means disposed to talk.

Meanwhile the first hand of the game at whist had been played through, and Mr. Haxtoun and his partner had scored the odd trick, which was, Medhurst thought, doing very well, as his own cards had promised no such result.

Mr. Haxtoun, however, began, in a plaintive voice: —

"Did you not see, Mr. Medhurst, that Snow was ready to trump the heart?"

"I confess I did not. And my lead seemed a mere choice of evils."

"Never regard it in that way," said Mr. Haxtoun, with a sort of wail. "A lead is a great opportunity; everything depends upon it. And, permit me to say, you made three different errors in your lead: first, in returning mine you were too precipitate, — you should have shown your long suit first, — and you should have given me back your strongest card; and allow me to remark that, with the queen, knave, and ten, you must invariably lead the queen; and you should have led up to Snow's weak suit, and through Lilly's strong one."

"Indeed, I am sorry I was all wrong," muttered Medhurst. "Stupid of me!"

"And I could have taken that club," pursued Mr. Haxtoun, in a voice of bitter anguish. "If you

had observed my play you would have seen that I had the knave, and it was wholly unnecessary for you to trump my nine of diamonds, for it was the highest card. It was such a pity not to have saved that trump. Lilly trumped over you ; she was certain to trump, certain," — Mr. Haxtoun's voice rang out piercingly,—" so that my play weakened their hands, and your throwing away a spade would have strengthened ours. I am afraid we lost two tricks — two tricks! One more trick I am absolutely sure we might have made."

By this time Medhurst's recollections of the hand were as faint as "*les nieges d'antan*" ; but he was ready to admire his partner's grasp of the situation. He determined to mind his own game, and summoned all his remote acquirements of rules and suggestions. But he was at once involved in a dilemma. He had a good hand of trumps, but, fancying he saw a chance for a profitable "saw," he trumped when his partner led a low card. This only was necessary to prove to Mr. Haxtoun that he had no knowledge of the game.

"May I inquire how many trumps you had?" said Mr. Haxtoun, in a soft voice, his head on one side, when the hand was over.

"Five," said Medhurst.

"Is it possible? Heavens and earth!" cried Mr. Haxtoun, infusing all the solemnity of an invocation into his formula. He then proceeded to tell his partner what had been lost by his misplay. It had been apparently one of those unique opportunities when the mere cards one holds are of no account; when address, skill, and subtle observation

can do everything. Yet, by a simple piece of carelessness, perhaps of ignorance, these possible results had been hazarded, put in jeopardy, by that dreadful act of trumping. The affair was really serious. Medhurst began to fear the old gentleman would shortly come around and collar him, asking him what the devil he meant by it.

"I don't believe you could have taken a trick more, Uncle Leonard," observed Lilly.

"By Jove, no! They made three as it was," put in Arthur Snow.

But that apparently made no difference to Mr. Haxtoun, who evidently *s'inquiétait de perfection bien plus que de gloire*. Medhurst's failings and shortcomings were no doubt plentiful, but he was not allowed to be unconscious of them. He began to feel timid, apologetic, and not a little cross; to regard technicalities as a bore, and correctness of play as an art beyond him. The old gentleman, however, being used to these stormy intervals between the hands, was quite contented with his partner, and felt no doubt that his partner was equally contented with him.

Mrs. Haxtoun listened from a little distance with considerable approval of Medhurst's bearing under affliction. If there must be a secretary it was, after all, well to have a young one. A man bears the yoke in his youth with better grace than later in life. She understood very well that her husband was having a capital time. There was nothing menacing or portentous in his tone yet. Accordingly she could give a large part of her attention to Rodney Heriot, who had drawn an easy-chair near,

and was talking to both her and Cecil. The group, to the eyes of a man situated as Medhurst was at present, was typical of much that is delightful. He took note of Cecil's attitude, as of other details, and wondered what sort of a look was in her eyes as she raised them to her admirer. He watched it all without bitterness of feeling, and resolving in his own mind never again to enter the parlor in the evening, at the risk of becoming Mr. Haxtoun's partner, was not even vindictive against the present form of innocent recreation.

CHAPTER IV.

MOTHER AND SON.

MRS. ESTÉ'S dining-room would have made a good feature of a mediæval castle. As it was it had been the central idea from which the late Mr. Esté developed his Queen Anne house, on the Delaware. He had found a set of oak furniture in the north of England, for which he had wished to build a room, and he had spared neither money nor trouble to make it perfect.

> "Carved with figures strange and sweet,
> All made out of the carver's brain,"

was the great *buffet*, which took up half the side of the room, from floor to ceiling; and so were the tables, chairs, and settles. There were friezes of flowers and birds; panels representing chases through wood and dell with huntsmen, dogs, and deer; knights and ladies; gargoyles and grinning masks; coats-of-arms, crests and quarterings; legends cut into every moulding in quaint characters, giving homely old Saxon proverbs and saws. The room was so dark, with its black carvings, its crimson and leather, its oak-studded ceiling, that it required all the morning sunshine which could pour in, and all the vistas the open

doors and windows commanded into the out-door radiance of earth and sky. There were, too, the glitter of massive gold and silver on the sideboard; the white of the lace-bordered linen, which just covered the top of the table without hiding the rare carvings of the sides, and the brilliant colors of the porcelain. Mrs. Esté, sitting in her high-backed chair, needed just such a background to set off her white morning-gown, her delicate, babyish old face, the little, fluffy, silvery curls, surmounted by a bit of Honiton. Mrs. Esté had been far from young when she made her first marriage forty years before, and one felt almost a dread of knowing what her actual present age might be. Her son was in the habit of rallying her concerning it when he wished to vex her.

"I was a young woman when you were born, Rodney," she would reply, "and a pretty woman; so you can quarrel with me for nothing."

This was true. Mrs. Esté had been an acknowledged beauty at the time of her marriage to Mr. Heriot, and after his death had been a fascinating widow for ten years, but had then made a second alliance. Her first match had been a good one; the second was brilliant. Mr. Esté was one of the most successful railroad men of his day, and at his death left his property unconditionally to his widow. Rodney Heriot had been nineteen when his mother married Mr. Esté, and there had been some estrangement between mother and son in consequence. She had had three children by her first husband, of whom the eldest, a girl, died in infancy, and Herbert, the youngest, at the age of ten. Thus Rodney

was the only survivor. Whatever he became in after-life, as a boy he was inclined to wholesome, youthful, romantic views. He adored his pretty little mother, and Hamlet hardly suffered more at his parent's second marriage. "Hyperion to a satyr" would have been to his mind a mild rendering of the difference between his father and his successor. Mr. Esté was considerably younger than his wife; a Swiss by birth, a German by education, who had made a lucky invention and brought it to this country, where he realized handsomely upon it. He then applied the proceeds to large financial operations, whose success was so fabulous, so unprecedented, that the insignificant little man became to every one save his step-son a most important personage. The two hated each other, and when Rodney was twenty-one Mr. Esté told his wife to give over to her boy every cent of his father's fortune and let him go. Rodney went, nothing loth. "'Banished? What's banished but set free from daily contact with the things I loathe?'" he declaimed, like a second Catiline.

For the ensuing fourteen years Mrs. Esté had a grievance which her husband was ready to acknowledge. He had sent her only child away from her, and he had the loss to make good. He lavished upon her everything she wanted, and she wanted everything the world contained. Every summer she went to Europe, and if Rodney had nothing pleasanter to do he joined her for a month at her villa on the Lago Maggiore, — days longed for by the poor, withering beauty, then wasted in poignant vexations, bickerings, and recriminations; finally regretted and

remembered as if they had brought her the sweetest maternal joys. When Esté finally lay dying he probably knew that it was certain to be Rodney Heriot who was to profit by his accumulations, — the boy he had hated for his handsome face and his patrician air, quite as much as for his gibes, his sarcasm, his freakish rebellions. Rodney had spent all his own money long before his step-father's death, and had, in fact, been living on his mother's secret remittances for five years. In his confused impressions of his relations to life and the world in general it had mattered little to him where his money came from so long as he had it in his pocket. Sometimes, when he had felt worn out, and had indulged in hazy wishes for something which might profit him more than his incessant pursuit after enjoyment, he had expressed an opinion that it would be a good thing if Esté were to die and give him a chance to go home and live with his mother. But when the longed-for event actually came to pass Rodney showed no haste to change his ways of life.

Under the circumstances Mrs. Esté felt that the least she could do was to show herself a deeply-afflicted widow. She wrote sheet upon sheet of black-bordered note-paper to her son, telling him how good her poor August had been to her. She talked about her religious aspirations and consolations, and quoted from the devotional books she was reading at this crisis. Rodney only glanced through these effusions. He knew his pretty mamma so well by this time that he believed her only ambition was to pose for a part, and play it out successfully. He had found so much that was false in her

it hindered his belief in the true. He had seen her a widow before, in sweeping crape gowns, with a huge frill at her throat and a coquettish cap, Thomas à Kempis in one hand and a crumpled black-bordered handkerchief in the other, wet with her incessant tears. The spectacle then had filled him with the tenderest woe. Nowadays he smiled at present and past with equal disbelief.

"I know you are in a dreadful state of grief over the late lamented Esté," Rodney wrote to her. "A man so pleasing, so refined, so complete in all the essentials which enchant a woman's taste, must be properly mourned. It is a mysterious dispensation, which cut him off in the flower of his days, and left you to enjoy his wealth. But take heart of grace; these sorrows for rich husbands have their compensations. As for my going home to mingle my tears with yours the thought is too affecting. By-and-by, when your grief is a trifle quenched, you may expect a visit from me."

Time did wonders for Mrs. Esté, and at the end of six months she made no more allusions to her husband, used cream-tinted paper, and wrote to her son he had better come. Something more enticing was on hand for his amusement, however, and he put it off for a year. When he finally came he took his mother by surprise. She had intended to be in New York at the time of his arrival; but had been staying in the country, too despondent to go back to her town life, and take up her social duties. She felt old and lonely, and was unhappy about her boy. He was not a good son to her, she told herself, with bitter tears in her weary old eyes. She

seemed suddenly surprised that Rodney should in any way have failed to meet her wishes, and answer her needs. She had trained him faultlessly as regards manners; he had the air of a little prince from the time he was admitted to her table, a velvet-coated stripling. She had spared no pains to give him the correct tone; she had taught him what was fit, and what was unfit, for the liking of a man of the world. He was to know everything to a degree, — eat of every apple once. To touch his heart, save with admiration of her own prettiness and elegance, she had never striven; to foster his aspirations after things noble, pure, and lofty, instead of deadening them by cynical representatious of the meaning of the life which went on about her, had been an effort beyond her little, frivolous, worldly brain. But when he had been a little lad he had worshipped her, hovering about her with adoration in his blue eyes; and she wanted his love now. She had always had somebody devoted to her, and she knew not how to live without some sort of incense. The flavor had gone out of life now that the little, fussy, anxious, ambitious Esté was no longer at her side, to stimulate her into efforts to display his wealth, and outshine the wives of his fellows on Wall street.

Early in March, two months or more before our story opens, Rodney Heriot walked into his mother's house one day. He had been seized by a whim to come, he said, but should probably take the steamer back next week, as he wanted to be in London by Easter. Nevertheless he stayed on. He became at first conscious of comfort; his rooms

were pleasant; the house was full of idle servants devoted to him. He found, too, that his mother had grown older, and her man of business told him that she ought not to be left alone, for she got morbid and flighty. Added to these inducements to remain Rodney had another.

"If you will marry Cecil Haxtoun," Mrs. Esté said, when he had been at home six weeks, "I will make a handsome provision for you. Of course you will have everything when I die, but you will not need to wait for that."

Rodney showed no marked indication of purpose after this suggestion, but he said nothing further concerning any intention to spend the season in England. He had come back to his mother loaded with debts, but he had not confessed them. He had always observed that by maintaining absolute silence concerning his affairs he kept her in dread of disclosures which might terrify her, and made her anxious to stave off any trouble by lavish presents. Thus her generosity had already cleared up matters for him, and he was perhaps glad to feel himself for the present safely out of all danger of getting into new scrapes.

After these explanations let us return to the dining-room, where Mrs. Esté and Rodney Heriot were eating their breakfast, the morning after he had taken tea with the Haxtouns. He had, as usual, come down at nine o'clock, and found his mother in her chair. He kissed her forehead and took his place opposite. There was a certain degree of likeness between mother and son, although the points which had made beauty in her, in his case gave

mere delicacy and refinement. Two men-servants brought the breakfast, and then hung about the sideboard until dismissed. Mrs. Esté made her son's coffee herself, with little, withered, trembling hands, pouring a few spoonfuls of black liquid out of a diminutive silver pot, and filling up the cup with cream. She herself ate and drank nothing save her *bouillon*. It seemed only by an effort that she sipped that. The truth was, that until her son came home she had not for years been up till noon, and she could not gather her forces until late in the day. Still, she pertinaciously insisted that her nerveless, weary old body should be dragged out of bed at eight o'clock, sponged, rubbed, dressed, and led downstairs, that she might lend a charm to her boy's breakfast-table. There was nothing more amusing to Rodney himself than making an entire change of his habits. It had not belonged to his scheme of existence to rise punctually at half-past eight o'clock, breakfast on simple, wholesome food, walk over the place, pay a morning visit, and spend his evenings in a dull household, making himself interesting, if possible, to mother and daughter; but he accepted these necessary sacrifices cheerfully. He liked at present this absence of sensation and of all excitement. He enjoyed the solidity of his mother's possessions, and there was some piquancy in the notion that presently they would all be his, to make ducks and drakes of if he wanted to. Under these circumstances, with some millions in his own right, what would he want, what should he like? He waited to see.

He watched the trembling motions of his mother's hands as she made his coffee.

"Poor old lady!" he said. "What makes you get up at this hour of the day? You might be stronger if you were to lie in bed till noon."

"Oh, I am strong! I go to bed early. I like to be up in the morning," returned Mrs. Esté.

"You were in bed when I came in, last night," said Rodney.

"I went at ten o'clock. I got dismal. Do you ever get dismal, Rodney?"

"Dismal? I don't know what you mean. If I am bored and savage with what I am doing I go and do something else."

"But then, a woman can't, — at any rate an old woman. I get frightened. Some day I shall die, and I wonder to myself if I am a dreadful sinner, and what will become of me."

"No doubt you're a sinner. You've got good wages in this world, as anybody can see who looks about this house. You can't expect all this, and heaven too." He laughed loudly.

Mrs. Esté shuddered. Twenty times a day she made some kind of an appeal to Rodney's tenderness, and each time when she was repulsed she said to herself it was not worth her while grinding her teeth upon the stone he offered her.

"Well, well," she now said, with a shrug of her thin shoulders, "we are all sinners, I suppose. You are one, I know."

"I never pretended to be anything else."

"You must now. You must be upon your best behavior. Cecil Haxtoun is a very bright girl."

"Yes, she is bright."

"Did you have a pleasant time last evening?"

"If you suppose I have a good time going over to hear that old man maunder on about his dyspepsia and other complaints, and blow up his partner at whist, your imagination concerning my preferences is not lively."

"But you go all the time."

"One is thankful to have anything to do in the country. By Jove! I shall end by falling in love with that girl. I get so little of her society it keeps my appetite at the keenest."

"You mean that you don't see Cecil?"

"Oh, I see Cecil, — pretty little devil that she is!"

"If you see her that ought to satisfy you."

"Ought it? You've been a pretty woman yourself, and must know how admirably it contents a man to see a girl and never have her to himself. Everything in the world should be enjoyed in its own special way. I like a picture on the wall, but" —

"Your time will come. She is young; she will keep."

"The other night," continued Rodney, with his loud, rather sharp laugh, "I contrived to get her on a sofa beside me. Mrs. Haxtoun seemed to be asleep in her chair, and the engaged noodles were in the next room. 'Now,' said I to myself, 'I'll see if I can warm her up a little.' She had been an iceberg all the evening. She looked delicious, — that side-view of her cheek, and ear, and throat; occasionally she turned her face and let me see her eyes. Well, just as I was about to say something that would rankle stalked the old gentleman, on

his way to bed, with a basket of silver in each hand. He observed, with disappointment and disgust, that a visitor was still there, and began to march up and down the room."

"What did you do?"

"I came away. If Cecil had been a married woman, and the enemy her husband, it might have paid to stay till past midnight. He is the most insupportable old bore! I wonder what kind of an old man I shall make. Do you suppose I shall turn out such a burlesque on humanity as most old fellows?"

"You never know what a man may develop into after he becomes a *père de famille*."

"I swear I will keep on the safe side, then."

"You are too clever, too much the master of yourself, to turn out a bore."

"Spare my rosy blushes. I don't imagine old Haxtoun bears the most phantasmal resemblance to what he was as a young man."

"I remember him when he married Jane Schuyler. He was twenty years older than she, but it was considered a charming match. But he was a regular old bachelor, had lived all his life in Philadelphia, and anybody might have foreseen just the set, formal routine he would take a girl into."

"You want me to marry Cecil. I must be fifteen years older than she is."

"But you have not lived in Philadelphia all your life."

"I have missed those moral advantages, surely."

"Mrs. Haxtoun mourns over Cecil's small opportunities. Years ago Mr. Haxtoun would insist on

living in the country, in order that he might avoid noise and interruptions, and she was glad to give in, that she might save expense, and be able to spend lavishly on her children's education. As soon as Cecil was eighteen she went to pass half the year in town ; but Mr. Haxtoun could not be coaxed into it. She longed to go to Europe ; but he will not consent to go himself, or let her go until he has finished his book."

"Cecil has had opportunities enough. The mother wants to marry her to an English peer, no doubt."

"At any rate, if the girl had been brought up in a different way you would not have liked her so well."

"How well do you suppose I like her?" asked Rodney. He had finished his breakfast, and was leaning back in his chair, holding a cigar in his left hand. There was enough of boyishness in his look and attitude to flatter maternal illusions that he retained poetry and high spirits beneath the crust of worldliness which he liked to exhibit. She nodded with a motion which fluttered the airy little curls about her forehead.

"I think you like her pretty well already," said she.

He snapped his thumb and finger.

"I never actually cared that for any woman," he exclaimed.

"I do not believe it."

"Believe it or not, as you like ; but I never cared that for any woman," he said, repeating the action.

"Do you mean to say that you were never on your knees before any woman?"

"Oh, plenty of them!"

Mrs. Esté shook her head.

"Then I am sorry for you. It is not to your credit. I don't know why you shouldn't have inherited a heart. Your father" — She pulled herself up a little. She had learned not to sentimentalize about herself and her experience. "But you will fall in love now. Cecil is charming," she said, with vivacity. "Shouldn't you like a wife?"

"For a week, — yes."

"Oh, you will fall in love! Something will rise presently, and master that hard, cynical intellectuality of your nature. When it comes give yourself up to it. Let it come, like a wave drowning reason and resistance."

Rodney laughed again.

"I am not unwilling. I admire the girl."

"Does she like you?" asked Mrs. Esté, peering into her son's face. It seemed to her he flushed a little.

"How should I know? I never asked her."

"Does she treat you uniformly alike?"

"Uniformly alike? She is as changeable as the wind. One time she seems ready to crush me with her cool disdain, and will hardly throw me a word. Then again she will be brimming over with talk, and pour it out until her mother puts an extinguisher on her. Sometimes she is soft enough to melt in my mouth, and again she puts my teeth on edge."

"Mark my words," said Mrs. Esté; "she is in love with you, Rodney."

He bent down his head, and leaned his chin upon his breast. His color had certainly risen, and his mother watched him with some feminine triumph.

"How could she help being in love with you?" Mrs. Esté pursued. "She never saw anybody to compare with you."

"I'm not so sure of my fascinations. Take rather a reckless, brilliant woman of the world, and I do very well; with Fanny Dalton, for instance, nothing is wasted. She knows everything, understands everything, and one loses nothing there; she gives one back as good as she gets, if it is only by the curve of her lips, or the laugh in the corner of her eyes. But a young girl! Who can tell what is going on in that mind of hers? With all that fire there must be plenty of fuel. There is nothing she will stop at, if she feels inclined to say it; yet she is apparently absolutely unconscious that her words carry the least meaning. Impelled by the irresistible feminine instinct for forbidden fruit, she constantly breaks over barriers and boundaries."

"Cecil is so innocent! You ought to adore her for it. You ought to thank her mother for bringing her up under her own eye" —

"I have seen girls before brought up under their mother's eye; yet what they did not know was not worth knowing. However, I do not say I disbelieve in innocence and ignorance; and if I were to marry, I should like to marry an innocent girl, who was in love with me."

"I predict that you will."

"If she falls in love with me at present, it is sheer disinterested goodness on her part. I am dull;

I am insipid; I am too serious. With a father who is a perfect wind-bag of conceit and whim, and a mother who is afraid her daughter will not be safely chaperoned, I have no chance. If you really want to do anything for me, mother, now is your time! Give me an opportunity to make love to Cecil."

"I'll ask her over here."

"She will be petrified by the infernal dulness of the place. Use your invention. Entertain a little."

"Suppose I ask Fanny Dalton to come for a month. She has written again and again, begging an invitation."

"There is always so much drama where Fanny is."

"That is what you want, — drama. Fanny wants to marry you; but you will not let her marry you."

"No, — not if I can help it."

"But, utterly convinced of the impossibility of that, she would help you to marry somebody else."

"All I want is somebody to keep things going."

"Keep things going, and herself on top of them. I will promise Fanny an outfit from Paris — one or two of Worth's dresses in it — if she will help us."

"You have the ingenuity of the evil one. When Satan wishes to lure woman into his kingdom, he sings just such a song as yours. Write to Fanny."

Rodney's commands were rarely so definite. It was generally a trifle benumbing to his mother's powers to feel that he wished anything from her. He indulged in the most generalizing form of speech while intimating his wishes; but there was no lack of

definite decision in his actual requirements, and everything left undone was certain to stir anger of a swift, deeply cutting kind. He was in a very good humor to-day. Mrs. Esté followed him to the door, and stood there a moment in the sunshine, and watched him light his cigar and stroll across the lawn towards the stables. She was not apt to show herself in so strong a light; but there was no one here to observe her. In spite of the prettiness and *infantillage* of her make-up, she looked old and felt old. The soft wind moved the white, airy curls about her forehead, and freshened her a little. How bright the world was! Everything was green; everything was bursting into blossom, all the air had a scent of flowers. But such beauty mocked her. She had no part in it. She must huddle into the twilight, and hear from far, far away the murmur of the world to which she had once belonged. She must use what little strength she had writing to Fanny Dalton. Fanny would be an efficient person in this great, silent house.

Mrs. Esté crept upstairs, and sat down in her morning-room before her desk. She pondered vaguely over Rodney's mental attitude towards Cecil. He wanted to be loved, which was a more fatal sign in a man like him than being in love. Perhaps he felt, — who knows? — that he had not compassed a fair experience. He had not had much love yet; no sisters, no cousins; perhaps, as he said, no inamoratas. She wondered what he had been through. Sometimes, looking at his delicate, cold-cut face and his cruel blue eyes, she felt as if he had a whole inferno of memories behind him; but he was living

quietly enough now. Mrs. Esté had good taste. She always took a certain tone with men concerning young girls; but in her heart she fully believed Cecil was anxious to marry her son. He was almost an ideal *parti*. He would have everything to give a wife; and what else does a girl ask? Cecil was clever; she had been trained in the art *de se faire valoir*. Girls were clever. How clever she had been herself! — too clever sometimes. But she was no longer clever, but old and dull. Sometimes she longed to be quiet in her last sleep, pitiless although the grave was. At the thought now she shuddered, nevertheless. Something seemed to clutch at her out of the darkness, and she had nothing with which to save herself.

The thought of Fanny Dalton was an anchor. She drew her paper towards her, and scrawled a letter of invitation.

CHAPTER V.

MEDHURST.

MEDHURST was introduced to Mr. Haxtoun's great subject the morning after his arrival, and for the fortnight ensuing he spent all his time and much of his energy in mastering the details of the work, already in a sense completed, and putting the vast accumulations of what the author called "material" into shape for future use. He found that the secretaryship, which he could not yet make up his mind frankly to accept, was at least no sinecure. However he might regard the worth of his occupations they were sufficient to engross all his time. He breakfasted at half-past seven, then went to the study, whence he did not emerge until dinner at three. After an hour at table he returned to his desk, and employed himself making out a fair copy of his short-hand report of Mr. Haxtoun's dictation. Towards sunset he went down to the river-bank, took a skiff, and rowed up the river; then drifted back in the dusk, often lying at full length in the bottom of the boat. Tea was over when he came in, but he found his meal set out on the study-table, and ate and drank without troubling even a servant. At first he had been asked into the parlor every evening; but after rigidly declining, on the score of necessity for

hard work before bedtime, he was presently left to himself. The evenings were now too warm and too short for Mr. Haxtoun's game of whist, and dearer to that gentleman than any game was the certainty that his great work was making fair progress.

The Aryan epics soon became well-worn ground to Medhurst. They offered at first a return to the old fairy-land of poetry and romance. The noble and beautiful forms and heroic pictures, the spontaneous impulse of action and feeling kindling even the simplest of the stories, fascinated him. After making his living for years by dressing up the every-day horrible and commonplace into something the public should find readable, it was grateful to free his mind of limitations and answer this beckoning to wide horizons. Their orbit was a large one, for Mr. Haxtoun's scheme halted at nothing. After leaving his secretary to revel for a time in this carnival of fancy, the author blandly remarked that now, having surveyed the field, they would set to work. Their object must be to grasp the whole subject, — omit nothing essential, yet allow no rudimentary details to hinder the concentration of their attention upon the important points.

The plan required nothing more than the clearest judgment, the most ample and trained powers, the most systematic and careful labor. In order to complete the work within two years, Mr. Haxtoun went on to say, they must get ready ten pages of foolscap, amounting to some three thousand five hundred words, daily. He had prepared copious notes, and was ready to dictate with the unfaltering speech of a sibyl, who overflows with inspiration from higher

powers. Medhurst, on his side, was ready to write twenty pages of foolscap, if need be. All he wanted was to give fair service, and earn his wages. There were difficulties in the way of these excellent results, however, which the young man had not foreseen. Mr. Haxtoun's literary style was not clear; it was far from concise; it seemed at times the answer to the old riddle, and went round and round the house without ever touching the house. Unfortunately, too, when occasionally Medhurst wished to pare and prune, his suggestions only put the author on his guard.

"You see, my dear young friend," said the old gentleman, "you are a journalist, and have found it essential to acquire a style, which, though neat and epigrammatic, would seem flippant in a great work like this, which embodies solid and massive thought. I would rather take a long life to do one thing well, than accomplish fifty whose perfection was marred by impatience and over-haste. Don't you see the force of my remarks?"

"I certainly do," said Medhurst. "But, after all, it is no bad training for an amanuensis to write for a daily paper. He learns to be accurate, as well as swift, — like the rider who has to jump through the hoop at the exact moment, or he will find no horse under him."

"I will make a note of that illustration, if you will allow me," said Mr. Haxtoun. "I may make striking use of it when I am drawing my conclusions. But, after all, your application of it is a fallacy. If I recall aright my early experience at the circus there were a good many hoops, and the rider only jumped

when he had plenty of breath and a good chance of safety."

Medhurst half groaned, but made no reply. He had begun to believe that to question Mr. Haxtoun's methods, and sift his facts too vigorously, would be to upset many of his most cherished deductions. Sometimes it seemed to him that a good stiff breeze of inquiry would blow everything to the ends of the earth; that all was chaff, and that there was no kernel of good wheat in the whole mass at which he was working. However, he said within himself, what did it matter? Mr. Haxtoun had taken up the occupation for his own enjoyment. There was no doubt of his excellent scholarship; and if he had undertaken to edit a classic he might have found his powers amply recognized; but having, in some unlucky moment, been seized by the notion that the same idea lay beneath the Achilles of the Greeks and the Siegfried of the Goths, Ulysses and Tannhäuser, he was in danger of being lost in a morass, bewildered and benighted. Faith had at first not been wanting in Medhurst, and, at times still, he had days of pure enjoyment. But Mr. Haxtoun's speculations turned over and over in such endless vortices, his intricacies were so deep, and his mysteries so insoluble, that Medhurst began to regard the worth and authenticity of the plainest facts with scepticism, and could hardly avoid a tendency towards ridicule and opposition. But, after all, what did it matter? Medhurst reiterated to himself. Mr. Haxtoun had engaged him to do the work of a mere machine; the author might die before his labors were complete; even if finished

nothing depended on their success; if he liked to work with a probable result of dismal failure, it was merely failing, — nothing save his vanity could suffer, — and better men than he, with salvation depending on success, had worked wisely and still failed. All he could do, Medhurst insisted to himself, was to fulfil his part of the bargain, and turn out at least ten fair pages of copy a day.

Mr. Haxtoun, on his side, was delighted with his secretary's capacity for steady, intelligent work. The pile of sheets, growing day by day in his desk, were beautiful in his eyes. He handled them with a smile; he showed them every day to his wife and visitors, and read passages aloud to any one he could get to listen. He was already negotiating for the publication of the first volume, and discussing the style of binding.

Medhurst's introduction to Rosendale had bewildered him a little by its unexpectedness, and not even the experience of the game of whist did away with the novelty of his impressions. After a night spent in alternating between wakefulness and restless dreams, in which he was perpetually following a slight, erect figure flitting on before him, an arch face, full of the sweetest mischief, constantly turning back, he decided that he must use all his strength of mind not to have his fancy taken possession of by a witch like Cecil, against the power of whose charms no ordinary resistance would avail. He was apparently, however, to encounter few temptations. His daily routine became fixed and remained unchanged, and involved no dangers to his peace. He occasionally had a talk with Alec; but his acquaintance with

the ladies of the family progressed very slightly. Mr. Haxtoun engrossed him all through dinner, and when he was about to rise Mrs. Haxtoun made a point of putting a few gracious questions to him. As for Cecil, she hardly addressed him at all. She was invariably late at dinner, having been too full of occupations to dress in time. Once in her place she absorbed every one at the table except her father, beginning to narrate, with the liveliest energy and the most unblushing candor, everything she had seen, said, and done since breakfast. She was a very pretty spectacle of a lovely, babbling child; yet piquancy was not lacking, nor knowledge of the world either, in the accounts of her morning's amusements.

Medhurst discovered the art of seeming to listen to Mr. Haxtoun, — who invariably took dinner for an opportunity to shape out some new fancy, and exhaust its significance in a sea of endless twaddle, — while in reality he observed Cecil closely. He gathered facts, remembered them, and drew inferences. Although he was shut up in the study from morning until night, he knew each day more and more about Miss Haxtoun and Mr. Rodney Heriot. Medhurst had done a little in the way of fiction, — every profession has its curriculum, — and he made up his mind to watch and study this love-affair, which impressed him as being a little out of the usual. Every pleasant morning, between eleven and twelve, Mrs. Haxtoun, her daughter and niece, were in the habit of repairing to the tennis-ground, which was quite easily within the range of Medhurst's eyes, as he sat at his desk, although a group

of laburnums just outside the window screened him. He could see, day after day, Mr. Heriot ride up the avenue, leave his horse at the stables, and saunter across the lawn to the ladies. He had a frank, pleasant way with Mrs. Haxtoun and Miss Winchester, but before Cecil he seemed a little at a loss. His easy, unembarrassed talk might not falter; but he looked at her with a sort of hesitation. It puzzled Medhurst to know why the suitor did not advance faster. He considered Heriot the luckiest man he had ever met. He had been everywhere and done everything, and now had ample wealth almost within his grasp, and a chance of winning a beautiful, young, unspoiled girl for his wife. A chance? A certainty. Medhurst, over and over, with some amusement, told himself that Miss Haxtoun was a coquette. She knew her power, and was playing with it a little, when she alternated between coldness and warmth. One day she would listen to Heriot with a sort of shy wonder and silent expectation; at another time she had not a word or a look for him, — her mind seemed elsewhere. She could not sit still a moment. She insisted that her cousin should play tennis; then, after her first failure in serving, flung down the racket, ran to a flower-bed and picked a bouquet, which she tore to pieces when made. She would sing to herself until startled by her mother's sharp reprimand, and sometimes break out into an inconsequent burst of laughter, as if some most amusing thought beguiled her. Next day, it might be, she would meet Heriot with the most childlike expressions of pleasure, — would look at him frankly and fearlessly and tell him apparently

every stray thought which came into her head. What stimulated Medhurst's masculine perceptions was the attitude with which Heriot accepted all this. He treated these alternations of sweetness, rudeness, and trivialty, as if they were nothing particular. Medhurst wondered if he were actually in love; or whether he, on his side, had the same ebb and flow of impulse, his own reserves, his own imaginations. This state of things appeared foolish to a looker-on. Medhurst could easily enough understand a man's hesitation to offer merely himself to a beautiful girl, with a doubt of his own presumption all the time. But there was something very comprehensive in what a man like Heriot had to offer. Success seemed a thing definitely certain. Medhurst felt sure that Cecil was easily to be won by such a suitor. He remembered, with marvellous vividness of memory, how a woman he had once known had talked of the chance of a rich marriage, and had flung all obligations aside to make one. All the bitterness of this recollection made it clear to him that no girl had a conception of happiness which wealth would not fill. He expected any day to hear that Cecil was formally engaged to Heriot, and it naturally soothed and moderated his spirit, and tranquillized his imagination concerning her.

CHAPTER VI.

"WHISTLE HER OFF AND LET HER DOWN THE WIND."

ONE evening, late in June, Medhurst had rowed up the river towards sunset, and taken his supper at a little German beer-garden, on the left bank, where a band played three nights a week. The one actual pleasure of his life at present was to be out in his boat. He had always in his early days known some river intimately, and had made it a part of his fixed belief that for beauty, for ideal charm, nothing can equal a river flowing from the mountains to the sea. As he rowed up against the current, something seemed to lure him on, beckoning into the far, wide reaches, the mysterious turnings, the beautiful interminable distances. It always seemed to ask him to go on forever, and he wanted to go on forever.

But this evening he had left his boat, and had sat smoking and drinking beer in the little garden, set round with tubs of budding oleanders and hydrangeas, listening to the music, until a distant clock struck nine. Then, finding it later than he had supposed, he rose, ran rapidly down the dusky fields to the bank, jumped into his boat, tied to a post, loosed it, and with a single pull at the oars shot out into the middle of the stream. The band still played,

but the notes of the violins and flutes only reached his ears, and then were merged into the murmurs of the river-ripples. A curious little thrill of feeling struck him, making him tremble from head to foot, as he listened to the far-off, persistent, melancholy strain, which repeated itself again and again. The sunset had lasted late, but now only showed a pale glow in the north-west; the lights streamed from the garden across the black river; the constellations blazing in the north grew nearer; a warm, south wind blew up-stream. He felt suddenly lonely — bitterly lonely. He asked himself, with a kind of passion, why he, and he alone of all men, stood isolated in the world. While he had sat listening to the music, some vague, nameless ecstasy had taken possession of him, inspiring almost rapture. He had seemed to feel the memory, or the expectation, of an exquisite happiness. Now it was quite over, and he could not recapture his sweet and glowing fancy. He felt, instead, the loneliness and silence of the world; the sadness of the black horizon; the solemnity of the high arch of the far-off heavens, — these toned down his thoughts austerely, and gave him a feeling of unrest. He told himself he had two hours' work to do before bed-time, and that his mood had been ridiculous. Still it seemed to him impossible to lift his oars and row down stream. The music still played and kept its hold upon his imagination. All at once he remembered why it had affected him; it was a waltz of Arditi's, and he had danced it years before with Fanny Blake. While he thought of it now, he felt the contact of her slender figure; he experienced

the wild, youthful delirium of the waltz, floating on and upborne as if by pinions; he saw Fanny's animated, pale face, and her melancholy, half-closed eyes. He uttered a sort of cry, and stretched out his arms. He longed to have her beside him again as of old, witty, and sweet, and seductive. While he thought of her the music ceased and the glamour fled. He snatched his oars and rowed rapidly down the river, and in twenty minutes had put up his boat, and was crossing the terraces towards the house. Pale stars shone out from the depths of rose, honeysuckle, and syringa. The air was full, over-full, of perfume. He felt a grudging sense, that to go in was to lose the beauty of the night, the throbbing joy of this early summer out-of-door life. He would have liked to sink down among the grass and the blossoms, tired by his exertions, and faint from spent emotions, and rest the whole night through. But his work called him, and he sprang up the steps of the back piazza, and vaulted easily over the window-sill into the dark book-room. The moment he was inside a soft rustle made him aware that he had disturbed some occupant, and, almost instantly, a match was drawn, and one of the candles in the sconce was lighted.

"Oh, is that you at last, Mr. Medhurst?" said a voice he knew very well.

"Yes, Miss Haxtoun. I jumped in at the window very unceremoniously."

"You frightened me terribly," said Cecil, standing with the match still burning in her fingers, and staring at him with dilated eyes.

"But I had no idea you were here," said Med-

hurst, who felt that he was hardly responsible for her fears.

"Papa sent me for you ever so long ago."

"Indeed!"

"You were not here," continued Cecil. "The room seemed deliciously cool and quiet. I was so tired of talking to the people in the other room I sat down in that chair for a moment's rest, and I went to sleep."

"I am very sorry I roused you."

"But you did not; I did not sleep long," she pursued confidingly. "I woke up some little time ago. At first I could not make out where I was; then I remembered, and I grew afraid, — I seemed so far away from everybody. It was at that moment I heard your steps, and sprang up and seized a match in a dreadful fright."

Her candid recital touched Medhurst pleasantly. His mind as he entered had been a little savage; but this might almost serve as an adventure to a man who had no adventures. She stood with her back to the light, and, with her white dress, seemed almost to shed light herself in the dim room. Her charming, slight figure, her bare arms, the frill at the elbow, the ruff at her throat, the brilliant, arch face, — all these points, thrown into distinct relief, were as clear to him as a spirited etching.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

"On the river."

"Is that where you go every night?"

"Yes."

"I have wondered what you did. Do you go alone?"

"Quite alone."

"Do you make visits anywhere?"

"Visits? — no. Where should I make visits?"

"I thought you might know people, — you never seem to care for our society."

Medhurst felt like laughing.

"I have no acquaintances in this vicinity."

"You like the exercise, I suppose."

"Perhaps that is it."

"You like the change from this dull room."

He looked at her, and waited for what she would say next.

"I was thinking about you as I sat here," she now remarked.

"Before you went to sleep?"

"Yes; and after I woke up."

"That was extremely kind, and I am flattered."

"Oh, I thought nothing flattering," she returned, looking at him, half-smiling. "It occurred to me that you must be dreadfully lonely." She paused a moment, and when he made no reply she went on in a half-deprecating manner, as if finding it necessary to substantiate this theory. "You are young, — I don't see how you can be utterly indifferent to everything going on among young people. Are you really so completely absorbed with those dreary old epics?"

Medhurst laughed outright. He so rarely laughed that this outburst surprised him as much as it did Cecil.

"Don't ask me to make confessions," said he. "I might confess too much."

"Don't you like your work?"

"Honestly, I like my work very well. If I am useful to your father I have no more to ask. He pays me good wages."

"Is that everything?"

"Everything would be too much."

"I wish I might think you were not bitter and sad. You look so sometimes," persisted Cecil.

"I had not the least notion you ever looked at me."

"Oh, yes; very often!" said Cecil, unhesitatingly. "If I did not, — if I sat at the table with you day after day, and had no idea that you were there, — I should be a very dull person."

"If I sit at the table looking bitter and sad," said Medhurst, lightly, "I ought not to expect observation. I will try to mend my manners."

"I see," cried Cecil, with some petulance, "you are determined not to be friends with me."

"Friends?" repeated Medhurst, somewhat bewildered.

"I should like to know you," declared Cecil. "I should like to talk with you; above all, to hear you talk. I always listen to what you say. Have you not noticed that?"

"I so rarely say anything."

"But when you do," — she went on breathlessly, — "then I am sure to listen. I can tell you many things you have said," she added triumphantly.

"Look here, Miss Haxtoun," said Medhurst, with decision; "you should not say anything like that to me. Either you do it in derision, which is cruel, or you are over-kind. The position I hold in the house in no way entitles me to it. You have your

interests and occupations; I have mine. They never meet, never mingle."

"You do not think I would say it in derision," faltered Cecil, with a crimson face and with a trembling voice. She was unable to continue. She seemed overcome with shame at her own boldness. Medhurst looked at her intently.

"Perhaps I was harsh," said he; "if so, forgive me. I am a rough fellow. You see you had better leave me alone."

"But you do not think I could say anything in derision," whispered Cecil, her face now quite pale.

"Honestly, I don't. But I am not sensitive. I am not much of a hero in my own eyes, and have no thought of being so in other people's."

Cecil evidently had something more to say, whose weight was on her heart and tongue; but she hesitated for a moment, and so lost her chance. At this instant a servant entered, bringing a message to Medhurst from Mr. Haxtoun, requesting his presence in the parlor.

"I had quite forgotten," exclaimed Cecil, with her habitual little laugh, "papa sent me for you."

"I wonder what he wants, — a game of whist?"

"I think not. The room is full of people to-night."

Medhurst ran his hand over his hair.

"I'm not very presentable; but it does not matter," said he, feeling that he must be consistent with his proud statement that he did not wish to play the part of hero. She led the way at once, and before Medhurst had received any impression save of following the crisp, transparent draperies, which set

off the tall, slender shape moving on before him, he found himself in the parlor, and was called upon by Mr. Haxtoun to give chapter and verse in defence of some statement the old gentleman had committed himself to, which had been challenged by Rodney Heriot.

CHAPTER VII.

"NOTHING, IF NOT CRITICAL."

SOMETHING unwonted in Miss Haxtoun's aspect, as she entered the parlor after her talk with Medhurst, impressed Rodney Heriot rather vividly. It had also a startling effect upon the young lady's mamma; but then Mrs. Haxtoun had the chance, before she slept, of acquainting herself with the actual facts in the case, and, without pressing her inquiries with undue emphasis, easily elicited from Cecil every word she had said to the secretary, and his answers to her. Rodney Heriot, on the other hand, was left to draw his own inferences. Cecil had been sent to the book-room by her father, and three quarters of an hour later came in with Medhurst, looking flushed and radiant. Rodney was in a position to be jealous, and he became jealous at once. It was evident to his perceptions that Medhurst had enjoyed few opportunities of talking with Cecil, while his own, though more frequent, had left his experience a blank. He needed nobody to tell him that he had never succeeded in rousing just that degree of animation in the young girl. She wore now an air of intense excitement, and seemed almost tremulous. Thrown into the position of outsider Rodney could observe coolly and critically.

He had given himself up of late to the idea of winning Cecil, and had flattered himself he was behaving with great judgment and delicacy. His views were not extravagant, and what a very young man calls love was not the most active of his emotions. He wanted novelty, some experience he had never had before; and nothing could be more novel and fresh than to give himself up to this intimate and personal hope. He had been left to himself since he was twenty-one, and his habit had been at times to ask himself, sceptically, how much enjoyment he had got out of life. He never complained aloud, but his thought had been that a man never gets what he wants in this world: the more he reaches out for pleasure at any cost, knowledge at any cost, freedom at any cost, — the more of a dull, bound slave he is; compelled to smart every time he tries to snatch at the supreme flame which is to satisfy him. These doubts of the worth of any existence he had ever led, swarming like a cloud of bees, had dinned him with their tumults, and stung him as well. He began to believe he should end by taking a disgust at all the pleasures of life, and find all his early sensibilities and instincts grow callous. Thus it was a genuine surprise to feel himself touched by Cecil. Even before his mother's suggestion that he should try to marry her, the wish had crossed his mind; he had said to himself that it might be the best thing he could do. There was something striking to him in the fact that his wish and will — usually all astray upon a wild road, delighting in their errors and persisting in their chimeras — were at last bound along a straight course, leading up to the very altar-rails.

He had been struck by Cecil during the first visit he paid to her mother, while she sat at the table at work, the shaded lamp lighting only her pretty hands and the lower part of her lovely face. She had not shown the least interest in the conversation going on, which had indeed dragged like a dull game; but had occasionally yawned, and passed her fingers over her half-shut, sleepy eyes. She had seemed to him like an adorable child; and it was always easy for him to love a child. Further intercourse had deepened this impression. She seemed to him full of childish freaks, all the more piquant because he was not slow to understand that her *naïveté* came from merely one side of her mind. He had thought to make her a quiet study, beginning with this virgin crescent, and gradually rounding his observation till he reached the full orb; and it was excessively annoying to him that he was to be hurried. He had waited for an auspicious moment before he struck the key-note of his love-making; but now it seemed to him that he had wasted time. He was ready to throw the responsibility of his lukewarmness upon Mrs. Haxtoun, who chaperoned her daughter too carefully. That good lady had tried to show him that her child had been as judiciously brought up as an European *jeune fille*. She had read "Daisy Miller" with a shudder, and thought it very unpatriotic of Mr. James to depict one of his compatriots as so lacking in a nice mother and nice ways. She knew that Rodney Heriot had taken the chief coloring and bias of his views from his European experiences; and hence it was that she had rushed to the chaperonage of Cecil, mustering alarming auxiliaries

in the shape of defences. Her only fault had been, Rodney said to himself, that she bristled up at the wrong time; she would take no hints; her decorums were too palpable, too visible. A duenna should merely play the graceful and pretty part of foliage to the flower, — she should not hide the flower. But he acknowledged all the time that a man should know how to pluck the rose he wants, no matter how high it grows, nor how closely it is guarded.

It had quickened his apprehension of his own love to see Cecil interested in another man. His first sentiment, when introduced to Medhurst, had been one of displeasure that Mr. Haxtoun had brought back such a young secretary; but the feeling had been momentary, and he had not associated it with any dread of rivalry where Cecil was concerned. Exactly how dangerous a rival Medhurst was likely to prove, Rodney was now anxious to find out. He had set him down as a silent, sulky fellow; but there might be something in him which appealed to a girl's imagination. He invited Medhurst to come over and breakfast with him; but Medhurst declined on the score of being busy. He then called in his wagon to ask Medhurst to drive; but Medhurst was out on the river. Having learned that it was in this way the secretary took his recreation, Rodney, the following afternoon, himself got a boat, and determined to lie in wait. He had a book of Marivaux's, lying wide open in the stern, and, half reclining on the bottom of the boat, propped up his chin with his hand and pretended to read. He was a steady reader of what he called good literature, although he had no absolute satisfaction in reading. But what

any man had done and felt he liked to do and feel. "La Vie de Marianne" had neither profit nor charm for him to-day. He was more interested in looking at the various river-fronts of the houses on the banks. He knew them all as kindly, hospitable places; but each, all at once, took on whimsical characteristics to him. His mother's place, with its high red chimneys, turrets, oriels, gables, and dormer windows, seemed a monstrous burlesque; the Haxtouns' sober gray stone assumed a dreary air. He thought of his mother against the illuminated background of her life, — a shivering, cowering figure, who was letting go her hold of the good things she had bartered her soul for. Mr. and Mrs. Haxtoun walked across the stage, before his mental view, wooden manikins. The very thought of the people in the other villas made him yawn; their green lawns, gay with flowers, representing a sure element of dreary gentility and mediocrity. In this monotony of commonplaces it might seem as if, before a lover's eyes, the picture of his mistress would take on some ideal beauty; but such was the impoverishing influence of Rodney's present mood that even Cecil's youthful fascinations suffered from the damaging tendency. At this moment he reflected that marriage to a beautiful girl was, to a man who wanted definite happiness, much like the experience of the hungry Bedouin, who stole a sack of pearls, thinking it contained corn. What was Cecil's beauty, after all, since, while it might delight him once, it was certain to make him miserable a thousand times?

All at once his frame of mind changed: the

motionless river-surface, which had placidly mirrored the skies, was ruffled by a little breeze, — the first breath of evening, freshening and reviving, like a cool hand laid on a fevered brow. The slight stirring of wind brought the scent of flowers, and some message as well, to Rodney, of the throbbing intensity of real life going on in the world, but which he had missed. He felt the pain and the sweetness and the longing of it. At this moment, too, there was a new movement along the river banks, and from the Haxtouns' boat-house shot forth a skiff, which, after gaining mid-river, turned straight up-stream, powerfully propelled.

"I say!" called Rodney. "I say! Medhurst!"

Medhurst crossed his oars and looked back at his starting-place, then behind him, and Rodney had a chance to draw near.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Heriot?" said he. "Good-evening!"

"Shall we have a pull together, starting fair?"

"With all my heart."

"Well, give me room."

"Keep three boat-lengths off," said Medhurst.

"All right."

Rodney's first stroke was a strong one, and sent his boat half a length ahead of Medhurst's, and for five hundred yards it seemed as if he were likely to keep the vantage so easily gained. He was a little surprised at his own powers, and became the dupe of more self-belief than the occasion warranted. He always found it a happy moment when he was actually doing anything. Medhurst, on his side, had waited to see what the other was equal to. The challenge had almost amused him, for Rodney inva-

riably went through his small social duties with such an indifferent and leisurely air that Medhurst had given him credit for little more nerve or muscle than he showed. But he now found that his competitor was master of a very sure stroke, and knew how to make his force tell. Rodney Heriot had done a little sculling in good company, just as he had done everything else. Medhurst had, however, no intention of letting himself be beaten. After a while he began to put forth more energy; at first steady and concentrated, then more and more impetuous. Rodney was left behind.

"Hello, hold up!" he called out. "You must have the devil behind you. I'm badly licked."

Medhurst laughed.

"You pull a better oar than I do," said he; "the thing is, you are not in training."

"When one can't win it is a neat thing to say one is out of practice."

"Shall we have another?"

"No, that will do. It is definitely settled that you have beaten me, and I will rest there. It is well to know where we stand."

"So be it. I don't often have an hour of triumph. Let me make the most of it."

"You owe me my revenge."

"Certainly, when and how you will."

"Let it be now. Come back to my mother's house, and take tea with us. Honestly, I want to get acquainted with you."

"I am very much obliged to you."

"No, you're not. You're a proud fellow. You have held off from me."

Their boats were close alongside. They were looking frankly each into the other's eyes.

"Come back with me," urged Rodney.

"Let me suggest something," said Medhurst. "There is a little beer-garden a mile further on. Go there with me, and we can have a talk."

"But why not" —

"You will find me better company," persisted Medhurst, with a frank smile. "Your house would strike me dumb. I have heard of its magnificence."

"Very well; I will go with you to the beer-garden. As for the house, it is not my house. My step-father wanted to see how much money he could put into it. I hated the man and despised him; but he knew what to buy, — I concede so much. Some day it would be worth your while to go through the rooms."

"Thanks."

"If I had come near the place two years ago I should have run the risk of being ordered off the premises. I owe my present lease of comfortable existence to the fact that my step-father is dead. I often feel as if his ghost would stride in and croak, 'Come, you miserable beggar, get out of this!' Do you know what it is to be poor?"

"If I knew anything else do you suppose I should be Mr. Haxtoun's amanuensis?"

"You are better off than I am. I had some money once, but I had spent it all before I was thirty. If I told you how I had lived since you might be in danger of despising me."

Medhurst laughed. Rodney Heriot's eagerness to talk to him puzzled him, without much interesting

him. But this tone made it clear that he wanted to break down the notion of any social barriers being interposed between their entire confidence.

"I don't think you have any clear idea of what poverty is," said he. "You could hardly have, — the only son of a rich mother."

"Poverty is not the worst evil in the world."

"I grant you that," said Medhurst, with some heat. "I don't envy you. I never wanted to be a rich man but one year in my life."

"When was that?"

"Six years ago, when I was twenty-two."

"You wanted money then for some woman, I suppose."

"Exactly; I should be afraid of it for myself."

"Should you?" asked Rodney. "I wonder, now, why you would be afraid of it."

"Why, you see all the fruit I long for is Hesperidean, golden, because I cannot get at it. Leisure, marriage, culture, good wines, good dinners, travel, adventure, — the idea of them carries zest along with it. If I were rich I should, no doubt, find life as dull as rich men seem to do, and I might blow my brains out."

"Leisure, marriage, culture, good wines, good dinners, travel, adventure," repeated Rodney, telling the words off on his fingers. "Leisure is a name for *ennui;* the pleasures of life are its cares and toils. Marriage has never been a habit of mine, but few men speak well of it. Culture I know little or nothing about; good wines and good dinners bring the very devil to pay with a man's constitution. As for travel, that would do very well if one had

not to carry one's self along. As for the adventures, who has any nowadays?"

"You can't be said to have tried everything so long as you are not married," remarked Medhurst, with rather a meaning smile, as he thought of Heriot's present opportunities.

Rodney did not answer. They had dipped their oars from time to time and now had reached the little floating dock below the terraces of the beer-garden. They tied their boats to the same post, and walked up the bank together. The last rays of the setting sun struck straight across the landscape, and the sky above and the water beneath were both full of color. The two men sat down at a table under a tree, where half-a-dozen unlighted Chinese lanterns swung in the evening breeze, and ordered some supper. Rodney Heriot had a colloquy in German with the waiter, who spoke English perfectly, and asked him what he could promise them that was particularly good.

"The best thing they have here is very bad," said Medhurst.

"I always like to find out anybody's pet vanity; discover a man's foible, and then avoid it."

Medhurst registered an inward vow that Heriot should not too easily take his measure.

"Do you come here often?" Rodney inquired.

"Once a week or so."

"You like at times to get out of the Haxtoun grooves?"

"It makes a little variety. The band plays badly, but then they bungle over very good music. The river is pretty."

"Yes, and the oleanders are fragrant."

"Accordingly I accept all such opportunities for solacement in a thankful spirit. I have plenty of silence, dulness, vacancy, after I get back to my work."

"Vacancy," repeated Rodney, with a slight grimace.

"Yes, vacancy. For I hardly consider that it counts when Mrs. Haxtoun looks in at half-past two."

"No fairer visitors?" asked Rodney, who had put his elbows on the table, and was supporting his chin with his two hands, and looking squarely into the other's eyes.

"None."

"Come, come, man!"

"Really, I don't know what you mean."

"Did not Miss Haxtoun interrupt your work the other night?"

Medhurst did not change a muscle of his face.

"No," said he.

"Who went to tell you old Haxtoun wanted you to come in?"

"A servant."

"You came in with Miss Haxtoun."

"Quite accidentally."

"You are discreet," said Rodney, with a light laugh. "You are admirably discreet. I drink to your very good health, Medhurst, and your continued discretion."

"I don't know what I have done to deserve your good opinion."

"You know how to hold your own when a woman

is concerned. But, at least, confess that Miss Haxtoun is charming."

"Miss Haxtoun? She is certainly beautiful, — exquisitely fresh."

"And very charming?"

"Certainly, — I should imagine she might be very charming."

"Ah, wise fellow! But, from your allusions, I have already gained the truth that six years ago you were charmed too much."

"As you say, — six years ago I was charmed too much. I rounded off that experience for life, and have never been charmed since."

"Forbidden fruit, eh?"

"Hands off! Touch not, taste not, handle not, — those are the signs which lie along my way. I happened to hear you say to Mrs. Haxtoun the night I came that your prohibition was, 'Not too much.' One does not need to explain the difference."

"I suspect I am the more rational being of the two. You have a chance to use your imagination. There are spirited capabilities about your face which indicate what you are. I would give something for your dreams."

"My dreams! You don't know me, Mr. Heriot," exclaimed Medhurst, impatiently. "Strong emotions have made small part of my life. You have lived for agitations, excitements, pleasures. You have been able to afford time and strength to go and seek them when they did not come of their own accord. As for me, I am a disappointed and a bitter man. I don't mind my poverty. What I do mind is, that I am twenty-eight years old and that I

have no career. My dreams are of my failures, my humiliations, my disgust at my forced labor for what has nothing to do with my actual life. As for women, — I fancy your allusion was to them, — all the caresses of Titania would win from me only a petition, like Bottom's, for 'a bottle of hay' or 'a handful of dried peas.'"

Rodney listened with a half-joyous, half-mocking smile, and his large blue eyes fixed on Medhurst's face. He had begun by a suspicion that there might be some intimate acquaintance ripening between the young fellow and Cecil, and he now accepted as a certain fact the fantastic fancy that Medhurst was wildly in love with the young girl. A certain sombre heroism in his face as he alluded to himself, a harsh obstinacy in repelling the suggestion that he might be charmed, were certain signs to Rodney that there were strife and conflict in his heart over present troubles and vexations. The waiters were lighting the Chinese lanterns and the musicians had taken their places on the little platform, and were tuning their instruments. The evening grew more and more beautiful every moment. The after-glow still lighted the sky and the river, and its lustrous yellow had the perfect color of the full-blown primrose, while the looming hills seemed to be wrapped in violet.

"Do you like Mozart, or Beethoven, best?" inquired Rodney, as if they had been talking about music.

"Beethoven; and next to him, Schubert. Mozart I care little or nothing for."

"That is because you make such a serious thing

of life. There is something very happy and joyous about Mozart, a dreamy blissfulness, a tender, brooding fancy. First, he gives us the hope of his happiness; a quiver of expectation runs all through the strains; he tastes all the sweetness of his coming experience, and his heart aches with the weight of the exquisite distress he longs for, yet dreads. Then his happiness comes, — full joy, voluptuous, supreme emotion, just like his dreams; no silence about it, no reserve; all told out with the abandon of absolute pleasure. And finally, when it departs — but no, it never departs; he holds it, still musing on it, in memory recalling it with all its tenderness, its transports, its imperious, seductive charms. One has heard the story over and over till one's ear grows ravished with it, but one can never hear it too often."

"You make me out a dull fellow; but Mozart's strains, repeating each other like echoes, — intertwining, caressing, following each other, — no matter how sweet they are, give me a feeling of satiety."

"What better is there than sweet satiety? But I should suspect you were a man to be mad after Beethoven. No sweet, soft happiness in Beethoven; no single unmixed emotion. You go on from one climax to another, out of joy to pain, out of heaven to hell; then out of hell opens heaven again, — a new heaven born out of the chaos of despair."

"You have thought a great deal about music?"

"I never thought about anything in my life; but for two years I studied music, and lived in a musical circle in Paris."

"Do you play on any instrument?"

"On the piano, a little, but badly. On the violin a little more, but so unsatisfactorily that of late I hardly touch the bow. I had a frenzy at one time to get hold of the thoughts of the masters; but I grew discouraged. The immortals will have nothing to do with me."

He spoke with his usual light superficiality. Medhurst stared at him, frankly puzzled.

"It needs time, I suppose, to perfect one's self," he remarked, uttering a commonplace to stifle the exclamation of surprise he was ready to make.

"No artistic pursuit can be an arbitrary thing. Your impulses must run current with it; they must not only be a complete yielding up of time, strength, and careful labor, but of the thought and intellect as well, if art is to reward you by moulding your powers and giving them shape and meaning. I can do anything for a few months; then all at once everything I have looked forward to and believed in seems crumbling to pieces. I seem to have lost my foothold, and have to look round for another."

"A man has to struggle on past that. If he stops short he does it at the risk of losing the impetus, which he cannot get up again. In fact, he sacrifices not only what he is going to do, but what he has done."

"Oh! I dare say I got out of music all I could. I used to attend the concerts at the *Conservatoire*, and I had some fine moments. What finally cured me of my infatuation was an experience at a private concert. I was to play Schubert's Sonata in A minor with a Hungarian pianist. I was particularly fond of my violin in those days. I used to

lean my chest down upon it with much the same feeling as if it had been the ivory skin of a beautiful woman. Well, this evening I was just about to flourish my bow, when I looked up and saw, about ten feet in front of me, a pretty Parisienne, who regarded me closely, and struck, probably, by my sentimental air, smiled with internal amusement. I felt that I was making myself absurd, and I have an antipathy for the absurd. I declined to play."

"Then your love of music was, in fact, a caprice?"

"You see through me at once. There is a moral meaning in all these failures of mine. Everything is a caprice with me. When the *élan* is gone, the pleasure is gone."

Medhurst was struck by these confessions, which, nevertheless, he did not take very seriously. Rodney's manner, easy, sportive, and impassioned at times, alternated with the freedom and spirit of one who is playing a clever part, and wants to succeed.

"I have wondered," Rodney pursued, "how it would be if I were to fall in love."

"Naturally my mind reverted to the same subject. I will hazard a conjecture: you have never been in love."

"What makes you think that?"

"That is no reason why plenty of women should not have been in love with you. I fancy you have studied the subject."

"Are women ever in love?"

"They say so. But then man is the emotional animal."

"You have been in love?"

"I seem to have made some such confession to-night, I hardly know why. I assure you my experience of the subject is necessarily limited, and what knowledge I possess is a mere gauge of the torments and the pains."

"Why did you think I had not been in love?"

"You seem to me to have gained no permanent impressions from life, — as if you had desired nothing absolutely. You would have become surer of yourself if you had had a simple intense emotion, and either felt more constancy to your ideals, or more abhorrence of them."

"I should, in fact, have preferred Beethoven to Mozart."

"I fancy you do. But you would have had less antipathy to the absurd."

"I see the force of that. In order to be a good lover a man must not hesitate to make himself ridiculous."

"He must have a fixed idea. Love is a burning-glass, and concentrates every ray of feeling."

"Ah, but a fixed idea is so difficult, and concerning a woman, of all creatures! No two ideas about her succeed each other in logical order. You cannot say to yourself, she is a light-winged, frivolous creature, therefore I must cull the flower of things, and offer only the honey to her. On the contrary, at a suggestion of this she at once seeks to prove to you that she is nothing if not profound; that nothing contents her save researches into the hidden mysteries. Then, too, you respect her innocence and modesty, and avoid the least intimation that you are

a masculine being, or live in a world of reality, and she will make allusions with the utmost scorn to what almost makes your hair stand on end. You fancy she values nothing but love. Nothing of the sort. She knows not what love is; she wants to dazzle and astonish you; she is utterly reckless in the way she runs after certain effects. But don't be encouraged beyond bounds; these surprising performances are not stimulated by any consciousness of you as an individual man, but are the work of a youthful spirit, which excitedly seeks to project itself into situations it has read or dreamed about, and which, guided by its untrained instincts, always produces too much and leaps too far."

Rodney seemed interested in his own words. He had been smoking a cigarette, which had gone out, and now went through the motions of relighting it, but was unconscious that he did not succeed, and proceeded to put it to his lips in his pauses, withdrawing it when he spoke.

"Young girls surprise me," he now remarked. "I confess, if I wanted to please one, I should not know how to go to work."

Medhurst laughed.

"Give me some advice," said Rodney, gayly. "I need it."

"I hardly think that."

"I swear I do."

"I don't mind giving advice," said Medhurst. "In a case like this it is a matter of scientific prediction. Take the young girl by the hand, and show her your mother's house. You have neither brother nor sister, I believe."

"Not one."

"Tell her so. Say, 'I am the only son of my mother, and she is a rich widow.'"

"You think young girls care for these material, sordid considerations?"

"I know they do."

"I confess," said Rodney, after a moment's pause, "that I am more romantic than you think. I should like to be ardently loved."

"That matter is between your soul and hers."

"You can't give me any recipe, — any love-philter."

"I gave you the result of my experience."

There was a moment's silence.

"It is time I was on my way back," Medhurst now remarked. "Brilliant irregularities and eccentric hours do not coincide with my present duties."

"Get into my boat and tow yours."

"No, get into mine, and I will row you home."

This arrangement was carried out. Rodney sat in the stern, with the rope of his boat tied to the gunwale. Medhurst plied his oars, and his companion talked. All meagre civilities, all limiting worldly ideas and conventional tones, seemed to have vanished in the intercourse of the two. Only what was natural showed itself in Rodney. Some sensibility; some taste for the beautiful, a little of the brutal; a mixture of poetry and folly, besides sensuality, made themselves evident in the recollections of nights abroad, which he poured forth. A scene in Germany, a song of Italy, an adventure in Paris, — he gave everything, omitting nothing. It was to Medhurst, after these weeks of silence, as if

some stream, dammed to its brim, had suddenly burst forth. There were the waters from a mountain spring, mixed with fresh-flowering branches, — a mouldering bough or two, and some ooze and slime.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT IN JUNE.

HIS evening with Rodney Heriot made a strong impression on Medhurst's mind, and was pondered over for days afterwards from many points of view. Rodney was naturally interesting to him, from having lived in a totally different range of experiences and ideas. He had had everything he had asked for, and enjoyed a chance to be happy as the gods, with roguish pranks, faults, follies, and vices, which he had had no need to conceal or calculate the results of. Medhurst had frequently thought of a career like this; but had never before happened to meet a man with the wit to have made the most of it. The impression of Rodney Heriot's words and laughter, his quips, jests, and intimate confessions, remained in Medhurst's mind, played over by interwoven and crossing lights, giving them different colors and shapes. He felt that he could not similarly have impressed Rodney Heriot. He was in no respect the equal of a man of the world, thirty-six years old, who had had a hat full of money with which to carry out every whim and caprice. And, unless one is either a saint or a man of the world, one cannot talk to a man of the world without seeming a pedant or a

fool. But, though he was ready to call himself names, the fact remained that Rodney had thought him worth talking to. He had, besides, suspected him of some particular interest in Miss Haxtoun, and this, probably, accounted for all. If any one else had believed him capable of any presumptuous ideas concerning the young girl, Medhurst would have regarded it much like an accusation of picking his employer's pocket. But it is natural for a lover to be jealous, and particularly of any one under the same roof as his beloved. Heriot little knew the scant opportunities he had of enjoying the young girl's society, Medhurst said to himself: he had hardly the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. He had shuffled and equivocated a little about his interview with Cecil in the book-room, concerning which Rodney had pressed inquiries, when it might, perhaps, have been as well to tell the whole story. But he disliked to part with it. Of course it was a mere jumble of coincidences; but the memory of it had a charm of its own. The young girl, standing there in the dim light, in her white gown, against the dark background, — a little timid and hesitating, yet full of sweetness and *bonté*, telling him that she thought of him; that, instead of his being in her eyes, as he had supposed, a mere writing-machine, wound up by meat and drink, he was an actual entity, thought of, listened to, and kindly regarded! It was rather a pretty experience, the real charm of it being the surprise, the sudden novelty. It had made him build no castles in the air. It was probable that she had, as Rodney Heriot had described, tried to dazzle and astonish

him; she had, nevertheless, been terribly frightened, and checked herself at his slight reproof. He did not think that Rodney Heriot had ever seen her at such an advantage. It was evident that there was within her the tremulous sensitiveness of a bird, with a bird's delicacy and vivacity. Medhurst wondered a little how happy Cecil was likely to be as Heriot's wife; he was inclined to believe that no woman took more than a materialistic view of marriage, and wealth would probably satisfy her. Yet Cecil was a young girl; and a young girl demands incense, homage, intense sensation, and a whirlwind of occupations; whereas, at Rodney Heriot's age, and with his antecedents, the freshness had flatly gone out of most experiences and anticipations. Yet Rodney expected her to fall in love with him.

One evening, just at the end of June, Medhurst, on issuing from his study, came upon Cecil, standing in the porch, with a look of unmistakable timidity and indecision on her pretty face. She moved aside to let him pass, merely giving a haughty little word in answer to his low bow; but he saw that she blushed vividly, and his own face tingled as he went down the terraces. He hated this form of meaningless embarrassment, and experienced that sense of his own youthfulness and greenness which afflicts any one when he longs for the vantage-ground of a man of the world, but is compelled to repeat the crudities of early youth. He went into the boat-house, let down his boat, and threw the oars into it, and was about to jump in himself, when he heard a voice outside, calling, "Mr. Medhurst!"

He turned. It was Cecil.

"Are you going on the river?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Oh, what a lovely time to go!"

"Yes." He looked at her, it was evident that she waited for an invitation from him; but he uttered no word.

"May I go with you?" she asked, with the audacity of a child spurred on by fright and nervousness.

"I should be most happy to row you," Medhurst replied, with deliberation. "Would Mrs. Haxtoun like it?"

"Why should she not like it? She never told me I was not to go rowing with you," Cecil replied, with a sort of indignation.

Medhurst knew very well that Mrs. Haxtoun was spending the day and night at her sister's, — fifty miles away.

"Mr. Haxtoun is in the summer-house; ask him," said he, with decision.

Cecil flew up the walk, and Medhurst went on in a methodical way getting the boat ready, working with a sort of fury. He hated himself, and his bonds and his limitations. He thought how Rodney Heriot would have replied if the young girl had begged to go with him, her eyes raised timidly, her whole face showing that bewitching softness. A man like that need not have given gruff, grim answers. There was something of the young Lochinvar about Medhurst, or so he believed, and he in no wise enjoyed assuming the airs of a dull pedagogue where a woman was concerned. "If she comes," he said to himself, "I must put a cushion

in the stern, and a rug on the floor." He waited, however, to see the necessity for this preparation before he made it. It was only for the flower of chivalry to be reckless in costly offerings to reigning queens. He took his boat around to the pier steps, and then he waited, looking across the river at a passing boat.

"Here I am," cried Cecil.

"Can you go?" he said, turning slowly to look at her, although he had heard her footsteps.

"Papa had no objection. He said I must bring a wrap, and there it is." She flung it down.

"Will you not hurt that pretty gown?"

"Oh, no matter! I always soil my gowns. Do let me have a good time for once." Her tone was half-pettish, half-imploring.

He betrayed neither elation nor haste, but went soberly about the task of making the skiff comfortable for her. She stood on the top step, holding the train of her dress in her hand, which, thus raised, disclosed a circle of frills and laces, from which issued two pretty feet in black silk stockings, and high-heeled slippers with huge buckles. That anything so fine, so dainty, should be injured by contact with aught unclean seemed to him unspeakable desecration. Still, all the time he was saying to himself that these exquisite, aristocratic creatures, with their dainty ways, were to be avoided as companions.

"Don't take so much trouble," cried Cecil, with an air of concern; "I should like to get wet."

"The boat is dry enough," said Medhurst. He held out his hand, and hers slipped into it.

"Shall I step on the edge?" she asked, hesitating a little.

"No; spring directly into the centre of the boat."

She obeyed him.

"Was that right?" she asked.

He bit his lip. He mistrusted her air of submission. He would have preferred her to show caprice, carelessness, or disdain.

He guided her to her seat, arranged the rudder-rope, and gave her precise orders. He took off his coat in a leisurely way, folded it up, and sat down on it; but the moment he took the oars he began to row with something like frenzy. He did not once let his eyes rest on the figure in the stern, but constantly turned, and looked over his shoulder.

"Why do you keep watch?" she asked.

"There are steamboats, and all sorts of river-craft."

"I will tell you if we are in danger of running into anything."

"I prefer to look out for danger, if you please."

"Does it bore you, having me here?"

"Bore me? No."

"For a week," said Cecil, with a sigh, "I have thought every day, 'If only I could go rowing with Mr. Medhurst!'"

"Are you so fond of being on the water?"

"Not always. I wanted to come with you."

She spoke with the solemnity of a child, and sat with a candid, serious look on her young face. She seemed to be listening to the tinkling of the water against the side of the boat, and to the measured beat of the oars.

"Don't you ever get tired of rowing?" she asked.

"I am generally glad to drift back. I often lie flat on the bottom of the boat."

"Looking up at the sky?"

"Very likely; or shutting my eyes and looking nowhere."

"I should like to do that."

"Lie on the bottom of the boat?"

"I should like a chance to do things in an easy, careless way. I should like to have plenty of time to think, and one could think a great deal out on the river all alone."

"I wonder what you would think about," said Medhurst.

"Oh, so many things! There are a great many things I don't understand," answered Cecil, turning a large, troubled gaze upon Medhurst, and speaking with the utmost emphasis.

"It does sometimes seem a little difficult to get at the actual core of meaning; but then, thinking is so hard."

"Do you think so?" exclaimed Cecil, wonderingly. "It seems to me so easy."

"Do you think about people, about life, or about fairyland?"

"About them all. But perhaps you would say I do not think about real life, — mamma says so. It seems to me easier and pleasanter to imagine people as I like them and need them. I want them nobler, more beautiful, more interesting, than they are in every-day life. Why should not my lovely dreams come to pass?" she cried out, with a sudden burst of feeling. "They have happened; they can happen

again. Why should I miss all that is sweetest in life?"

Medhurst, not knowing what to answer, kept silence. He heard a certain passionate emotion in the words, but the words themselves were incomprehensible to him. What had a girl like her, brought up at her mother's side, a chance to dream of, comprehend, and despair at the thought of having lost?

"I suppose you think I am talking nonsense," she now remarked, looking at him, and half-pouting, half-smiling.

"I am willing to wager all I do not possess that the prettiest and wildest dreams of your heart will come to pass."

She looked at him sidewise, then turned her glance upwards. She was blushing slightly. Medhurst had not once slackened speed since they set out, and they were by this time far up the river. He now rested a little, only dipping his oars occasionally, and, no longer engrossed with his strenuous occupation, became conscious of his position, far away from the eyes and ears of other human beings, alone with this young girl in the last and loneliest hour of the day.

"How quiet it is!" she exclaimed, after a little time. "But yet it is not lonely."

"No, — not lonely."

"The river is so much company; it has so much activity of its own, so many voices, so many murmurs, one may hear just what one listens for in its soft sounds."

She seemed to be listening, and he wondered to what.

"Have you ever been on the Rhine?" she asked, suddenly.

"Yes, many times."

"What strange, beautiful stories they have mingled with the every-day look of things there! Last winter papa used to make me translate and write out those legends for him, and they quite took possession of my mind for a time. Now, suppose a nixie sat on that rock across the river, combing her golden hair and singing a song to you."

"At present, at least, I should be quite indifferent to her song and to her golden hair."

"Don't you like German stories?"

"I get a good deal of them, you know. German literature is a great treasure-house of romantic ideas, and one gains a pell-mell of fantastic images, but few pleasing pictures, or complete and serene creations. The Greeks are so much truer to art and nature; their art is nature, and nature is always simple, no matter how beautiful or how infinitely various. Whether my intellect is too sceptical, or my imagination too sluggish, I am not sure; but those Gothic monsters, virgins, nixies, knights, minnesingers, and all those colossal but shadowy forms, are unsubstantial to me."

"But those stories symbolize the same meanings that the Greek stories did, — you believe that," cried Cecil, startled.

"That is what we are writing about," said Medhurst, "and we are getting on very well. We have almost two hundred pages of foolscap already finished on the subject. Having already done so much, it would be strange, indeed, if I did not believe in the identity of the Aryan epics."

Medhurst felt impatient, and had taken up his oars again. The sun was just setting, and above them, in the exquisite azure, floated a few rose-colored clouds, which were reflected in the water.

"Look, how beautiful!" said Cecil.

"Yes."

"I am enjoying this so much," she went on. "Does it not make you feel happy?"

He shook his head.

"Don't you feel the charm and the sweetness of it? It is so hard to define a feeling; but one is usually so bounded, so pent-up, that to be out under the skies, with nothing but nature, wide-spreading, beneficent, — it is as if — as if — if only one's arms were long enough one might clasp the whole world. Don't laugh at me," she added, suddenly, growing scarlet, conscious of the gleam in his eyes.

"I am not laughing at you, Miss Haxtoun."

He wondered about her more and more. This opportunity to see her freely had stimulated his curiosity instead of satisfying it. It might be that these delightful caprices had their root in a desire for admiration. Rodney Heriot would say as much. But what did it matter? He was not compelled to solve the enigma. She seemed to him a complex creature; full of fancy, full of paradox; shy, bewitching, tender, and audacious; changeable as the wind; frank, yet mysteriously reserved; candid, and rather vain; and, besides, so radiantly beautiful that her mere look tinged all she said with a hundred varied lights of sentiment.

She felt excessively embarrassed, and in any ex-

cited mood it was her way to slip a ring she wore — a large sapphire, set in brilliants — up and down her finger. This little nervous motion did not content her, and, taking it off, she held it over the gunwale and dipped it in the running water.

"Take care," said Medhurst; "you know the story."

"What story?"

He began to repeat: —

"Wohl sitzt am Meeresstrande
Ein zartes Jungfräulein;
Sie angelt manche Stunde,
Kein Fischlein beisst ihr ein.

"Sie hat 'nen Ring am Finger
Mit rothem Edelstein;
Den bind't sie an die Angel,
Wirft ihn ins Meer hinein.

"Da hebt sich aus der Tiefe
'Ne Hand wie Elfenbein,
Die lässt am Finger blinken
Das goldne Ringelein."

Cecil drew back her hand sharply, startled, replaced the ring on her finger, and held it there as if afraid.

"Tell me the rest," she said, when he stopped.

"Don't you know Uhland's ballad?"

"No."

"Well, then, here is the rest of it: —

"Da hebt sich aus dem Grunde
Ein Ritter, jung und fein;
Er prangt in goldnen Schuppen,
Und spielt im Sonnenschein.

"Das Mägdlein spricht erschrocken,
'Nein, edler Ritter, nein!
Lass du mein Ringlein golden!
Gar nicht begehrt' ich dein.'

"'Man angelt nicht nach Fischen
Mit Gold und Edelstein;
Das Ringlein lass ich nimmer;
Mein eigen musst du sein.'"

She seemed vividly impressed by the little poem; but she said nothing, only looked at Medhurst and waited.

"I did not mean to frighten you," he now remarked, rather mischievously; "and, after all, the Delaware is not the Rhine."

"No, luckily. I was thinking that the Rhine might be too delightful, too dangerous. Safety is something. When you are rowing at night you may be run down by a steam-tug; but there are no nixies or loreleys lying in wait for you. And I might fish in the river all day with Mein Edelstein, and no knight, with an ivory hand, would rise out of the water to threaten me."

Her tone was quite different from what it had been before.

"That is the way she talks to Heriot," Medhurst said to himself. The moment she was on her guard all her social training came to her aid, and she took the air of a clever woman of the world.

"Look up!" exclaimed Medhurst. The sun had been beneath the horizon for a quarter of an hour; but the clouds, and sky, and atmosphere had continued to grow more and more beautiful, gaining a singularly brilliant and luminous tone. Just above

where the sun had gone down were wide, golden spaces, between the ripples of crimson and purple, and one great, violet cloud, fringed with a border of flame, seemed to throb with its intensity of color. The hue the distant hills took on was indescribable, and the air itself seemed to be a medium of liquid light, which changed everything it touched into beauty.

"It is rather a romantic world," observed Medhurst. "Whether you are on the Rhine or on the Delaware you have the same heaven over your head; and so long as there is beauty in the world there must be poetry and longing in young hearts, and so long as there is poetry there will be knights and loreleys."

She was still looking up at the sky, but was evidently thinking out her own thoughts, which engrossed her more than the slowly fading sunset splendors.

"I fancy," she remarked presently, "that you have lived through a great deal."

"I!" exclaimed Medhurst, frankly amazed, almost annoyed.

"Yes," she returned, looking at him with a little, decisive nod. "I should not be surprised to hear of anything you had done."

"On my soul" —

"Oh, I mean great, heroic things," said Cecil, with enthusiasm.

"'Great, heroic things'?" he echoed sharply. "What absolute nonsense! What I have done have been poor things, unworthy things, pitiful things."

"I do not believe it," she returned, so pointedly it seemed brusque.

Medhurst drew out his watch.

"Miss Haxtoun," said he, "it is a quarter to eight. I suppose you are ready to go back."

"Oh, dear, I should like to go on forever."

"I await your orders. Shall I turn or shall we go on forever?"

"You must turn, I am afraid. Mr. Heriot is coming this evening, with a lady who is visiting his mother."

He swung the boat around. "We shall go down rapidly," he remarked. "The current is swift and strong."

"Don't go too swiftly; I want you to tell me about yourself."

"If you want an interesting autobiography I advise you to ask Mr. Heriot for his; mine is a tame and shabby affair, — nothing but obstructed fortune, restrained activities, unfulfilled ambitions."

"I never should want to know Mr. Heriot's," said Cecil, with spirit.

"Nevertheless, his life is interesting to hear about."

"But, no matter what he has done," cried Cecil, impatiently, "I want to know what you call ignoble and pitiful in your own career."

"You think I may have committed crimes."

"Oh, no."

"You have heard me tell Mrs. Haxtoun the main facts."

Cecil looked at him with a meditative air. "Your mother died at your birth," said she. "You lost your father when you were nine years old. You were brought up by your uncle. I remember that it reminded me of the 'Babes in the Wood.'"

"My uncle, on the contrary, was very good to me. Instead of coveting my six thousand dollars, he invested it well, and allowed it almost to double without being touched, bringing me up like his own child. He died when I was seventeen, and I was left to my own resources. I went to Harvard, and afterwards, for eighteen months, to Heidelberg. By the time I was twenty-one I had a fair classical education, and most of my money was spent. That seemed unimportant, however, for I expected to make my fortune at once."

"How?"

"You have a practical mind. Now, my fault was my indefiniteness. I was crammed to the roof with literature, and was hazy-minded about the worth of other things. But I decided to study law, and had two thousand dollars left to tide me over those difficulties, when, all at once, the money was lost by the stoppage of a bank where it was temporarily deposited. I had to do something instantly to keep myself from starvation, and took the post of assistant teacher in a boys' school. For two years I taught Greek, Latin, German, and some mathematics. Then I began to long for a chance to breathe, and I went into journalism. That suited me better for a time; then, in turn, I came to loathe that."

"But you said you had done ignoble, pitiful things."

"Look here, Miss Haxtoun. Once in his life a man feels an invincible strength, which seems to insure his getting from his career all that he craves. Intellect, heart, imagination, all combine to make

him strong. What have I done with my youth and my force?"

"You have done a great deal."

"I have not starved. All that makes success or defeat is, perhaps, the spirit of a life. Now, mine is all wrong. I am always at war with myself, my surroundings, my occupations."

"Are you unhappy as papa's secretary?" said Cecil, with a tremor in her voice. It seemed to him she shivered.

"Are you cold?" he asked, throwing down his oars. "Where is that cloak you brought?" He caught it up. "May I put it around you?" he asked, in a very soft voice.

She stood up. The boat rocked a little, and he flung his arms about her, steadying her while he drew the ribbons of the mantle and tied them at the throat. The night seemed to deepen in silence around them as they stood there. It oppressed him strangely.

"Now sit down," said he, with a feeling of haste upon him. "I must row my best. It is late. So Mr. Heriot is coming over?"

"Yes, and a Mrs. Dalton."

"Mrs. Dalton?" repeated Medhurst. "How old is she?"

"Oh, she is young, — a beautiful woman, with auburn hair and dark eyes!"

"Do you happen to have heard her maiden name?"

"Fanny Blake. Mamma used to know her very well."

"And Mrs. Dalton is staying at Mrs. Esté's?"

"Yes. Do you know her?"

"I know nobody nowadays. I once knew a Fanny Blake very well. She was the niece of my uncle's wife, — not my cousin; but she was frequently at the house."

"And did she have hair like dull-red gold, and dark eyes, and a peculiar smile, which torments one a little, and which one remembers, — is that your Fanny Blake?"

"Yes, that is my Fanny Blake."

"You will come into the parlor to-night and see her?"

"Indeed, I shall not."

"You must wish to meet her again."

"Quite the contrary."

"Were you not friends?"

"Friends? Oh, yes! But everything connected with that time in my life I should prefer to forget."

Medhurst was putting all his strength into his rowing, and said no more. Cecil looked at Venus shining in the west, with a young moon beside her. She experienced a vague, chilly disappointment, a wistful and solemn regret. The lights shone from the open doors and windows of the houses along the shores; but everything, even the familiar, dusky face of Rosendale, seemed remote and far off; real life, which she had dropped two hours before, appeared legendary and dreamlike.

"Here we are, Miss Haxtoun," Medhurst said presently with some relief, "and there is your father, waiting for you."

Mr. Haxtoun was quite nervous, and altogether irritable.

"I supposed it was only a half-hour's row you asked about, my dear," he said plaintively. "I have quite worn myself out going up and down the walk, and I know I have taken cold. I sneezed three times in succession, and there is a peculiar ringing in my ears. There now, — I experienced a distinct chill, which is probably malaria. It was excessively thoughtless in you, Cecil. It is almost nine o'clock, and there are guests in the parlor I was fairly ashamed to face. If your mamma were at home" —

All three of the guilty ones, of whom Mr. Haxtoun felt himself the chief, were very glad that Mrs. Haxtoun was fifty miles away.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. HAXTOUN'S TROUBLES.

BUT Mrs. Haxtoun came home the following day, and was not slow in gathering the news of all that had gone on in her absence. Miss Winchester enjoyed a grievance; and certainly the awkwardness of her position the night before was something which necessitated unstinted recital, with the fullest details. All day long she and Mr. Snow had been talking over the singular, the unprecedented, the almost painful conjunction of circumstances.

"If I were Heriot, now," Mr. Snow had begun more than once; but, pregnant with doom as his suggestion loomed up, no distinct statement had come to light.

"If I were your aunt," he had said again, — and this came home to Miss Winchester's imagination.

"I shall tell Aunt Jenny," she said. "I think it is my duty to do so."

"Yes, indeed; it is your duty, and I hope she will" —

The pause indicated something heavy with disaster to the guilty ones.

Lilly felt it unfair not to warn Cecil of her intention.

"I shall have to let Aunt Jenny know all about

your doings last night, Cissy dear," she said, in a soft, cooing, purring voice, going up to her cousin and putting her arms around her.

"What doings?"

"Your row on the river with Mr. Medhurst."

"Of course I should tell mamma about that myself."

"Should you, really? Aunt Jenny would not like it, you know."

"What harm was there in it?"

"Aunt Jenny has always been a little afraid about Mr. Medhurst. He is young, and very good-looking."

"But why should she be afraid of him?"

Lilly nodded, as much as to say, "It is all very well to make a brave stand, and seem unconscious." Then she added aloud, "You know very well, Cissy dear, you would never have thought of going out alone to row with Mr. Medhurst, if Aunt Jenny had been here."

"I can see no harm in my going out with Mr. Medhurst," Cecil said, in a dull, proud voice.

Lilly nodded again. "I see, — that is your rôle," she seemed to say.

"Just think, Aunt Jenny," she exclaimed, the moment she was alone with her aunt, "when Mr. Heriot and Mrs. Dalton came over last evening there was nobody except myself, and Arthur, of course, to receive them."

"Where was Cecil?"

"Oh, she came in, in about half an hour, with Uncle Leonard. But there was the magnificent Mrs. Dalton, faultlessly arrayed, sitting back on the sofa,

looking so bored, and Mr. Heriot seeming altogether annoyed and put out. Arthur says he never can talk to Mr. Heriot, — it causes him mental prostration, — and after a few ineffectual attempts he gave it up. Then, left to himself, Mr. Heriot went over to the piano and began to play softly. He played very nicely indeed, only he finished nothing; after going about half through a *nocturne* or a movement of a sonata, he will all at once make a sort of impatient discord, and then begin something else."

"But where was Alec?"

"Alec came in late, and was eating his supper. I could not rouse him to any sense of his duties. After he saw Mrs. Dalton, however, he was quite sufficiently interested. Oh, what a coquette she is! She even made eyes at Arthur; but of course he gave no response to such overtures. For one thing I thank Heaven, — Arthur is not easily run away with by fleeting fancies."

"It all sounds very unreal and unlike anything I am used to," said Mrs. Haxtoun. "Your uncle and Cecil out; Alec churlishly attending to his own comfort, and everything left undone for the visitors, — Mrs. Dalton a stranger, too."

"I don't think she minded; it all diverted her. She did not say much to me; but, when she did speak, she was sure to ask some question, cutting, incisive, which went right to the heart of things. She had seen Mr. Medhurst go up the river in the boat, and she was interested in finding out whether it was a Mr. Medhurst she had once known, — in fact, a sort of cousin of hers. He has the same name, but she could hardly make out that it was the one she meant.

The chief reason was, that her Frank Medhurst was rather a brilliant, versatile fellow; while ours is a sulky bear, with never a word to say to anybody, unless it may be to Cecil."

"I am sure, Lilly, he rarely addresses Cecil, or even looks at her."

"What, — not all last evening?"

"Did he come into the parlor?"

"No, I mean when he was with Cecil on the river."

"With Cecil on the river! What do you mean, Lilly?"

"Why, Aunt Jenny, I was almost afraid to tell you that Cecil was out rowing with Mr. Medhurst from half-past six until almost nine o'clock."

Mrs. Haxtoun uttered an exclamation, and then checked herself. She was not slow to perceive that Lilly found some excitement in the situation, and she did not wish to commit herself to any disapprobation of her daughter. It had always been Mrs. Haxtoun's definite conviction that Cecil would never do anything foolish, for the reason that, while her taste and judgment were maturing, she would never be permitted the chance. Every indiscretion of a young girl was her mother's fault: that was Mrs. Haxtoun's creed; but just now her faith in it was terribly shaken. Yet, after all, she told herself, trying to be just to Cecil, if Mr. Haxtoun had not first introduced Medhurst there would have been no opportunity for this foolish, this mortifying, escapade. Then, not to blame Mr. Haxtoun too much, she said again mentally, if she herself, instead of weakly yielding to her husband's wishes, had strongly as-

serted herself, the young man might have been sent away. At the very sight of his spirited face, held in check by the excessive quiet in his manner, she had felt that he was a dangerous inmate, had heard "a lion in the lobby roar." But instead of putting bars and bolts in his way, she had confidingly helped to let him in.

Oh, how to get him out again! It had always seemed to Mrs. Haxtoun that she was very clever. She foresaw everything, and took in the whole meaning of a situation with the clearest insight. Her imagination was so active that she was able not only to predict what would happen, but to indicate what was likely to occur under an entirely different set of circumstances. She thus gave people the notion that she was wildly theoretical, and her views were treated as clever fallacies. When a thing came to pass she could not say with consistency, "You know I prophesied that from the first," because she had also forecasted opposite results. She had said to herself that Medhurst might prove the very man Cecil was likely to fall in love with; but she had also said that when a young girl's fancies were in the air, as it were, one could not tell on which side of the hedge they would presently settle. She had at times argued that the sight of a clever fellow like Medhurst, who, at eight-and-twenty, could make no income beyond what he gained by a secretaryship, would make evident the superior worth of a man like Heriot, who could offer a girl everything. Ah, well! it is so difficult to be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove! — to teach a girl that she must be good, self-denying, religious, and

pure; that she must crave and seek beliefs and standards which will uphold her all her life, and be substantial helps on which she may rest "with the everlasting arms" beneath her; and, at the same time, make clear to her the importance of sordid considerations. Mrs. Haxtoun knew very well that for most people to live successfully in this world they are compelled to serve two masters, to acknowledge a higher and a lower law; but it is difficult to inculcate such teachings except by example. Lilly Winchester knew all about it almost instinctively. She was very bright, at the same time very proper and safe; but then, as Mrs. Haxtoun knew very well, she was sly, and had been known how to get herself out of trouble by lying.

It was difficult for Mrs. Haxtoun to sit quietly through dinner, and hear her husband talking to Medhurst about Firdusi, drowning his suggestions in a flood of contradiction, wearing out his patience by a slow deluge of interpretations, citations, and authorities. It was quite evident to her that the young man had neither heart nor interest in the matter, and that his answers came neither from heart nor brain, only from his tongue. Mrs. Haxtoun, did not, however, waste pity upon him; so far as he was concerned some mild form of excoriation seemed the most proper thing which could happen. But there opposite sat Cecil, for once, quiet, lifeless. As soon as the meal was over, Mrs. Haxtoun called her daughter to her own room, and made her sit down beside her. She pressed her hands over the blooming cheeks, and kissed her twice, gazing at her attentively, but tenderly, and with a yearning heart.

"You don't seem quite yourself, my dear," said she.

"There is nothing the matter with me," Cecil rejoined; "but I feel strangely quiet and dull to-day."

"Perhaps you took cold on the river," suggested Mrs. Haxtoun.

Cecil blushed a vivid crimson, then looked at her mother a little defiantly.

"So Lilly told you!" she exclaimed.

"You would have told me yourself, would you not?"

"But what was there to tell, mamma? I can't see that there was any harm in it."

"Harm? Oh! nobody would think of harm, actual harm. But it is hard to say anything in a single sentence. There is no harm, and yet there is harm. Now tell me how it was."

"It was just like this. Ever so many of these warm afternoons I have seen Mr. Medhurst go down to the boat-house and start for a row; and yesterday I felt idle, and longed for something pleasant, and I ran after him, and asked if I might go with him."

"You are so childish in some ways. What did he say?"

"He asked if you would like it."

"He was certain I should not. Really, he was very considerate. But it ended in your going."

"He told me to ask papa."

"And your papa consented, of course?"

"Yes, he did not mind in the least; but, then, he did not suppose I should be gone so long."

"How was that?"

"We went on and on. He rowed very fast, and it was so pleasant, — you cannot think how pleasant it was. Finally he asked me whether he should turn, and I said I supposed we must go back, but that I should like to go on forever."

"Do you mean you actually said this to Mr. Medhurst?"

"I did. I may have said more, but I cannot remember now."

"And do you really think such remarks were in good taste? Now, just remember how shocked you were at Daisy Miller and her performances."

The color came and went in Cecil's face. Her eyes grew larger. An indescribable surprise seemed to be taking possession of her.

"But — but — that was with a stranger — and — and" —

"Is not Mr. Medhurst a stranger?"

"I — do — not — feel — that — he — is."

Cecil made this confession, dropping each word as if it burned her, while at the same time some emotion dyed her face.

"But I do not know how you can have got so well acquainted with him. What did you talk about last night?"

Cecil pondered a moment.

"All sorts of things. I could hardly tell you half we talked about."

Mrs. Haxtoun's imagination began to be active; at this moment there was hardly anything she would have been surprised to hear. It seemed to her as if, instead of being absent from her daughter a day, she had been away for a year, — a year that might

have changed forever the heart and the destiny of the young girl, giving her an imperishable experience of what was bitter or what was sweet. She had thought she understood Cecil perfectly; but where in her girlish life had been the preparation, the hidden processes, leading to the sudden development of a tendency like this?

"And what do you suppose Mr. Medhurst thought of it all?" she asked.

Cecil looked at her with some quickening wonder and apprehension.

"I don't know what you mean," she said, hastily.

"But consider. Here is a young man filling, for a time, the position of your father's secretary; he is little thrown in your way, and, when he is, never presumes upon your interest in him. But now this is the second time you have clearly shown him that you have sought his society; that you" —

Cecil uttered a cry and put her hands to her forehead; but her mother went on relentlessly: —

"If Mr. Medhurst did not flatter himself that you had a decided *penchant* for him, or that, at least, you wished to indulge in a little flirtation, he would be unlike any other man, — and I do not believe that he is dull."

Cecil had buried her face in her hands. Her breath came quickly, and she was trembling all over.

"You can have no idea how readily men yield to the idea that women are in love with them," Mrs. Haxtoun went on, coolly. "In commenting to each other upon the least sign of preference given by a girl, they suggest only one interpretation, and that

is something to make any innocent girl almost die of shame."

Mrs. Haxtoun had now sent her arrow straight home, and was almost startled by the effect she had produced. Cecil began to sob violently; her head was burning, her hands were cold as ice. It was impossible for her mother to conjecture just what was behind all this agitation; its incredible violence seemed to mean more than humiliation. But the idea of her fault, sharply presented to her, had been startling to all her susceptibilities, and it had brought on a nervous attack.

Cecil did not long give way to her sobbing; all at once she looked up; her shy, wet eyes were fastened upon her mother pleadingly and reproachfully.

"Don't say anything more," she faltered, in a broken voice. "I — I assure you, you do not need." She seemed alarmed and ashamed, and Mrs. Haxtoun was not in a mood to press the matter further. She had meant to say more, fancying some little resistance on Cecil's part; she had been ready to discuss the social aspect of the situation humorously, ironically, sarcastically. But something in Cecil's personality all at once emerged out of the shadow, stood erect, and half awed her.

"I confess," she said, "that I am glad to let it all pass, if it will; but then you will learn, by-and-by, that things do not pass, — that is, without leaving consequences which develop in logical order. You must realize that Mr. Heriot is paying you very particular attentions; that naturally it must have made a deep impression upon him to find you were running about in a careless sort of way."

Cecil looked straight into her mother's face.

"I don't care about Mr. Heriot's standards," she said.

"I want you to care about them. It is the dearest wish of my heart, just now, that you should become Mr. Heriot's wife."

Cecil looked at her mother with a pale face. She had an expression as if the light dazzled her eyes, and blinded her.

"I am sure he loves you devotedly," said Mrs. Haxtoun. "He only waits for some little sign of liking from you to come forward. I hope you will give it, and soon."

They gazed at each other intently.

"He can offer you everything," Mrs. Haxtoun pursued.

"He has not got everything."

Mrs. Haxtoun asked no explanation of what Mr. Heriot's limitations were.

"It would make me excessively happy to see you married to a man of his standing. I have felt so limited, so hindered, where you are concerned, — so afraid that, at such a disadvantage, compared with other girls who live in great cities, and go abroad constantly, you would be compelled to make some commonplace marriage. Really, I cannot help regarding Mr. Heriot's coming here as something providential."

Cecil drew in her breath with a sort of shudder.

"Did you like Mrs. Dalton?" Mrs. Haxtoun now asked, willing to glide off to topics more general and of less meaning.

"No," Cecil answered abruptly.

"Why not?"

"I do not know; but I disliked her. She looked me over; she smiled at me; she seemed so consummately finished she made me feel crude."

"I don't care about having you like her; but show her nothing of your dislike. Did they say anything about the Fourth-of-July *fête?*"

"It was spoken of."

Mrs. Haxtoun had drawn her daughter upon her knees, and was caressing her tenderly. She began talking over the dress Cecil was to wear at the *matinée*, to which they were all invited, and settled that she was to have a new bonnet, which should make the gown now in the dress-maker's hands a complete triumph. Mrs. Haxtoun had a practised touch in soothing and pleasing those whose tempers had been ruffled, and she was just congratulating herself that Cecil's enigmatical emotion was quite spent, when, all at once, to her extreme astonishment, the girl gave a sob, sprang up suddenly, flew through the open door, and vanished.

CHAPTER X.

A FOURTH-OF-JULY FÊTE.

MEDHURST had been bidden to the feast at Mrs. Esté's for the Fourth of July, and had at first declined. On this Rodney Heriot had come to see him.

"You may have bought a piece of ground and five yoke of oxen; you may have married a wife and become lame, halt, and blind, in consequence; but, at any rate, you can come on a Fourth of July," he insisted; "and Mrs. Dalton says you are a cousin of hers, and she wants to see you."

"Less than kin, and less than kind," answered Medhurst. "However, since you are so urgent I will make a point of going."

He told himself the thing was an irksome task. Mrs. Dalton was, no doubt, curious to see her old friend once more; but the gratification of Mrs. Dalton's curiosity was no part of his scheme of existence nowadays. However, since the ordeal was to be met, let it come, and be over. It had tormented his pride to remember that he had once boasted to Fanny Blake that, in spite of his poverty and his insignificance, if she would but trust herself to him her life should be one long sunshiny day; that she should feel she had missed nothing; that he would be a rich

man in ten years. Recalling his old illusions, and his old belief in his own powers, his failure seemed something too humiliating to be borne. She would see at a glance his whole history, and probe him with questions which would compel him to confess his incompetence, his bad management, his false judgment in rejecting openings which might have led to success, and following up instead clues that had come to nothing. She was clear-eyed as a Fate, and had probably known it all from the beginning. He had no doubt of her magnificence and her success. He had seen her name in the arrivals and departures by European steamers. There was zest in her life, picturesqueness, pleasure. Well, he begrudged her nothing. She had had no passions except for the idle, the luxurious, the fictitious, the costly.

He walked to the *fête* with Alec Haxtoun, about twelve o'clock, on the Fourth of July. Alec looked him over critically. "Why, you are very well dressed!" he exclaimed.

"Much obliged to you. I don't know a better judge," returned Medhurst. "I have had the clothes eighteen months. I don't often wear them, because I like to feel that I have a coat somewhere which is not out at elbows."

"You look very correct. You wear your clothes very well. Now, I had this suit made to wear to-day. What do you think of it?"

"Oh, it is neat!"

"Becoming?"

"Everything becomes you, even the white gaiters."

"You don't like the white gaiters?"

"I like everything you wear."

"I was not sure about the white gaiters," said Alec, in a tone of poignant regret, looking down at his faultless trousers. "But there is such a deadly quiet effect about this gray that I wanted a little individuality to crop out somewhere. I wonder what Heriot will think of these gaiters."

"Does he take an interest in clothes?"

"But look at the man!"

"He has never impressed me as being well-dressed."

"You don't know the alphabet of the subject. He's faultless. His clothes fit like the skin; but he never wears the look of abject despair under their perfection that most fellows do. One wonders how he does it."

"He does not look fashionable to me."

"That is just it. He's not fashionable. I am, and I know in my heart that it is abominably caddish to be fashionable; but I can't help it, — I'm always fashionable. What is the effect to-day?"

Medhurst retreated three steps and gazed steadily at the young man, whose suit was pale gray, faultlessly cut, everything excessively tight; whose hat was bell-crowned, whose collar was a straight, wide band of linen, so stiff and so high that it threw his chin in air, and whose shoes were pointed at the toes. He carried a cane beneath his arm at an angle of forty-five degrees. His demeanor was solemn, — even his smile was painful; the unhappy smile such smiles.

"On my word," said Medhurst, "you are so perfect I love to watch you. But how do you expect to sit down?"

"There will be no necessity for my sitting down. At these garden-parties, you know, one keeps walking about and dancing."

"Oh, I didn't know!" said Medhurst. "I hope I may sit down."

"I wish I knew how Heriot would take these gaiters," said Alec.

As Medhurst walked along the terrace towards the house he was impressed by the unexpected prettiness of the scene. The river was so beautifully blue; the trees, which partly hid and partly afforded vistas of the water, were so well grouped, — all the distances were so picturesquely opened; the Queen Anne house, with its timbers and bricks, its chimneys and gables, made such a bright contrast of color beside the terraces, which were bordered by tubs of orange and lemon trees, laden with fruit, and alternating with huge aloes, — that he gazed about him with frank pleasure.

"There is our carriage, and there is Cecil just alighting," Alec remarked, and at once went forward to join his mother, sister, and cousin.

Cecil at once became the riveting point of the picture for Medhurst. She was tripping along towards the house after her mamma and papa, in a quaint, lovely poke bonnet, of white straw, trimmed with white plumes, and with a huge bow of white satin ribbon under the left ear. She wore, too, a sheeny white dress, with a lace fichu crossed and tied behind. Her pretty arms were bare below the elbow, except for some long lavender gloves, which rumpled loosely over the wrists, and in her hand she carried a bunch of white roses. She might have

been a bride in all this snowy white, Medhurst said to himself; and with such a bride as that walking towards him, with a shy, bewitching smile, Heriot might be easily forgiven for going out of his senses. Medhurst himself had not spoken to Cecil since they were on the river together, now three nights ago. He had a fancy that the little excursion had excited some dissatisfaction. There had been silence and thoughtfulness on Cecil's part; she did not once glance his way at table, and Mrs. Haxtoun had been unusually reserved. He was not surprised; the only surprise he had felt was at being on the river with Cecil alone. He had been cool at the time, but he had not been cool since. The worst thing about the dull, monotonous life he led, he had told himself repeatedly these three last days, was that his imagination, which would not be absorbed by his work, was free to give him all sorts of fantasies and dreams. Wherever he had been since that evening Cecil had seemed to be at his side, or at least not far away. The boat was filled with her presence, and this phantasmal image of her had gained more substantiality than she had herself possessed when she was there; for then he had been annoyed and tormented by doubts and fears. He recalled everything which she had said in a sort of ecstasy. He laughed over little phrases, — over her absurd confessions. His blood tingled with joy over this strange, sweet experience. But then, he had so little of interest to think of, it was not a thing to wonder at if he liked to free his mind of that intolerable burden of myths and legends, and experience a moment's excursion into romance on his own account.

He stood at a little distance, and watched Rodney Heriot receive his mother's guests at the foot of the steps. He threw some spirit and grace into whatever he undertook, which Medhurst felt was beyond that of most men. He was faultless in the practice of all the minor social duties, and a somewhat grand air, which he wore at times, took away every vestige of triviality from the performance of them. Rodney had seen Medhurst, and after he had led Cecil up to his mother, who sat just inside the rose-colored awnings, he came down the terrace to greet him.

"I'm glad you came," said he.

"I am highly delighted with Fourth-of-July *fêtes*. I should have said I did not like them."

"Begin by disliking things, and you have a chance of some agreeable disappointments in this world."

"I generally try to keep up my dislike consistently."

"I see you flatter yourself you are indifferent to pleasure. Now, mark my words, you like everything pleasant immensely."

"I liked that night up the river."

"Which night?"

Medhurst had the grace to blush.

"Yours and mine."

"You will be writing your 'Nights,' presently, like a second Musset. I suppose you will be denying the little episode of three evenings ago."

Medhurst felt vaguely annoyed. It seemed to him bad taste in Rodney Heriot to push this allusion. It was the cruelty of the rich man to deny

his poorer neighbor the comfort of his one little ewe lamb.

"If" — he began, — "if" —

"Well, say on."

"On second thoughts I will not."

"You do not deny it, at least."

"Deny it? — no."

"You glory in it?" Rodney was laughing, but his eye was serious.

"No, I regret it, since any one alludes to it in that tone."

"On my word, Medhurst," said Rodney, "I like you extremely; I wish you liked me half as well."

"I like you well enough," said Medhurst. "It would have been strange if I had not liked you after your talk of the other night."

"I tingled all next day at the thought of what I had said. Don't ever remind me of my confessions. I don't wish ever to hear of them again till the day of judgment."

He passed his arm under Medhurst's.

"How well have you known Mrs. Dalton?" he asked.

"We grew up together. She spent all her vacations in my uncle's house."

"Hm — hm — You must know her pretty well. My mother has made a good deal of her; used to take her abroad every summer. We have met year after year, but I am always afraid of these fascinating women."

"Yes, — I understand that."

"You can hold your own very well against them. You have dignity, self-respect; you are loyal to your

best feelings; you resolutely put down your worst"—

"Yes, yes; that description fits me to a hair."

"Come and speak to Mrs. Esté first. She is anxious to see you. Don't let her fasten herself to you, — she is a regular 'Ancient Mariner,'" said the dutiful son. They had walked up the steps and across the porch, and now entered the parlor, and found Mrs. Esté sitting on a sofa. She wore a black gown, of delicate gauze, which sparkled with jet, and her pretty head, with its airy white curls, rose out of it in piquant contrast.

"You never thought it worth while to come before to see a dull old woman like me," she exclaimed, with the *mignonne* air of her youth.

Thus challenged, Medhurst was at a loss for a rejoinder.

"Tell her you were afraid of her fascinations," said Rodney. "Self-preservation is the first law of nature, you know."

"Don't put your own wicked speeches into the young man's mouth," said Mrs. Esté. "He has wit enough to answer for himself. I like his face. I shall do him no harm; an old woman is no bad friend for a young man. She can tell him what to choose, what to avoid; what to do, and what to leave undone. One has to be old to know these things."

"She does not look old, does she?" said Rodney.

"She looks to me very charming," Medhurst replied, making a second low bow to the old lady.

"She has taken the elixir of youth," proceeded Rodney. "But, unluckily, she took too much of it,

not knowing exactly the prescription which would make her a fine woman of forty, and, quaffing a double allowance, she became the pretty, infantile creature you see her."

"He is never tired of teasing his old mother," said Mrs. Esté. "He is rather bored with me."

"Oh, no, I'm not!" said Rodney. "Somehow it seems 'homey' and comfortable to have a mother."

"Make the most of me while I last," said Mrs. Esté, with her little, impatient movement of the shoulders. "Go on and speak to Mrs. Dalton," she added, smiling up at Medhurst with her pretty, faded, little smile. "I fancy you are an old lover of hers. She is anxious to see you. All of us women have a tender heart for the men who loved us in our youth."

Rodney and Medhurst passed on. "Women of that age are always twenty years behind an idea," said the son. "She always reminds me of the withered actress, who played the part of Zaïre, and when she was praised said, modestly and deprecatingly, 'But one ought to be young and beautiful to fill that rôle.' — 'Ah, madam,' said the flatterer, 'you have proved the contrary!'"

"I admire a woman who retains her traditions of power in her old age," said Medhurst.

"I don't," returned the son, succinctly. "In fact, I think no pretty woman ought to live after she is forty."

"Ugly women may continue in existence, I hope."

"They ought never to be allowed to live at all. But here is Mrs. Dalton! She possesses the clearest *raison d'être*."

Mrs. Dalton was the centre of a group, but moved towards Rodney and Medhurst at once.

"Dear Cousin Frank!" she cried with some effusion; and, standing on her tiptoes, as if she were *petite* and he immoderately tall, she lifted her cheek to be kissed.

Medhurst had rarely been more annoyed in his life. He had for years experienced an inarticulate and smouldering resentment against Fanny, but had been conscious of at once loving while he hated, adoring while he despised, her. He would as soon have thought of going down on his knees and declaring his passion before all the world as of brushing her cheek with his lips while Heriot and all the guests looked on. But he did it, nevertheless, flushing violently all the while, and she drew back and lifted her eyes to his with a smile he knew.

"I am so glad to see you, dear Cousin Frank," she said, in a clear, vibratory tone.

"It is a long time since we met," Medhurst remarked, almost dryly.

"Tell me you are glad to see me again."

"I am glad to see you again. You are looking well."

"Am I?" She sighed a little, and looked down at herself.

"I saw you last six years ago in April."

"Do not insist on my remembering what is sufficiently in my thoughts already, — that I am six years older."

"You have lost nothing apparently, and have gained much."

"What have I gained?"

"More beauty, more accomplishments, — to say nothing of wealth, honors, magnificence"—

She slipped her arm under his.

"Come into the next room," she said, in a low voice. "Those people are all listening. If you had stopped with beauty and accomplishments, or if you had added knowledge of the world"—

"Six years ago I never thought you had anything to gain in the way of knowledge of the world."

"I knew nothing then, — absolutely nothing. Every idea I had in those days was a false one, — the outcome of foolish fancies gained from books or from commonplace people."

Medhurst looked down at her with close scrutiny. She had withdrawn her arm from his and walked along two paces from him. She was a very finished-looking woman, and displayed admirable nerve and poise in the way she carried herself and controlled the least movement of her dress. She wore white, of some airy texture, almost completely covered with lace, her slender figure and unusual height enabling her to carry off any amount of accessories with an effect of elegance. Her slim waist was bound with a violet ribbon, and the wide-brimmed straw hat she carried on her arm was trimmed with pansies.

"As to my wealth," she went on, "I suppose you know I am poorer than I was six years ago, when I had, at least, eight thousand dollars of my own."

"Poorer?" he echoed, startled out of some computation of the probable cost of the lace she wore.

Mrs. Dalton had had her little confession to make,

and had now acquitted herself of it bravely, she thought.

"Oh, I am horribly poor!" she said. "I don't see what remains to me except to go on the stage."

"The very place for you. But does Mr. Dalton sanction that sort of ambition?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, startled.

"He would hardly enjoy seeing you" —

She clutched his arm with vehemence. "How can you talk in that way?" said she, under her breath. "Don't you know" —

"Good Heavens!" thought Medhurst. "There has been a scandal, a divorce, or something."

"I beg your pardon," he said aloud. "Beyond the fact of your marriage, six years ago in June, I am absolutely ignorant concerning you."

"Mr. Dalton died almost three years ago," she murmured, dropping her eyes. "Don't you see I still wear a sort of mourning?"

"Oh, forgive me!" said Medhurst, eagerly. "I was heartless." He scanned her dress, and wondered where the signs of woe could be to which she alluded. He had played the cynic in meeting Fanny again, and now experienced remorse. The logical gap between Fanny as an ambitious girl, breaking an engagement of five years' standing to marry a rich man, and now as a married woman well placed in the world, he had filled up with a rich lover, a doting husband, all the pleasures and excitements of a brilliant social life. To find her a widow was a different matter; such an experience stimulated pity, sympathy, forgiveness; gave her the dignity of one

who had gone through experiences, comprising what is most sacred and pathetic in life.

"Have you children?" he asked, with strong curiosity.

"Thank goodness, no!" she cried; then added, in a different voice, "If you knew what makeshifts I am put to you would not wonder that I almost rejoice no fresh young life depends upon me. Now let us talk about yourself." But there was no chance of a longer *tête-à-tête* just then. Mr. Haxtoun had walked about with Cecil for a time, then had put her in a corner, and set out for his private enjoyment. He had a great deal to say, and burned for a listener possessed of intelligence and modesty. He grudged the holiday both for himself and Medhurst. Ten sheets of foolscap would not be spoiled to-day, and the loss concerned him intimately. Still, it was Fourth of July, and if a man were ever to unbend, throw off his armor, lie down in his tent, it was on a broiling day like this, with bursts of cannon reverberating at intervals from points up and down the river, while flags were flying, torpedoes exploding, and the general hubbub was so intolerable that it was difficult to sustain the close logical thoughts with which his brain usually teemed. But everything was auspicious for conversation, and, seeing Rodney Heriot standing apparently unoccupied except in watching Mrs. Dalton and Medhurst, he bore down upon his host with the smile of the foeman who sees his prey and is ready to strike.

"This is quite a break in my routine," he observed. "Usually, at this hour of the day" —

Rodney had seen himself marked as game.

"I beg ten thousand pardons; but I am just about to seize this fortunate moment to take your daughter into the picture-gallery," and he darted towards Cecil.

Mr. Haxtoun was disappointed, and his eye traversed the room. He had never succeeded in finding exactly his long-coveted opportunity to explain the full scope of his work to Rodney Heriot. He turned, and, as luck would have it, Medhurst and Mrs. Dalton were just at his elbow.

"I was just saying, Medhurst," he observed, "that at this hour of the day you and I were generally shut up in the study."

"Surely you are not regretting your dreary old work on a day like this, in a room full of lovely women," said Mrs. Dalton, smiling up at the old gentleman.

"Nothing equals the charm of a beautiful woman except the enthralment of a fixed idea," said Mr. Haxtoun. "If you knew the engrossing nature of our occupation, the delight of a slowly developing theory like a bud into the flower" —

Mrs. Dalton, to her dismay, saw Medhurst slipping into the crowd. She was left alone with the author.

"That sounds very delightful," said she, her far-darting glances seeking some chance of relief.

Mr. Haxtoun found himself a fortunate man. He liked any listener, but, above all, a woman young and beautiful, and who smiled into his eyes.

"In the primitive mind," he began, "unrestrained by the long literary and scientific traditions of which

we wear the yoke, there was a capacity for burning enthusiasm, for spontaneous invention, for moulding into permanent shape the full form of the elementary human idea" —

"I wish I had a primitive mind," said Fanny. "I should like to burn with enthusiasm, and mould an elementary human idea into permanent shape."

"If you would only study the Aryan epics" —

"What are they?" asked Fanny, with an irresistible smile, — "anything nice and naughty?"

"Um-um!" said the old gentleman to himself, half-liking and half-disliking this surprise. "I think you would find some of them rather — rather, we will say, piquant. The primitive mind was not scared by improprieties; the Aryan epics" —

"I never heard anything so immoral. Was that what you meant when you said I had a primitive mind? — Dear Mrs. Esté," she called, as that lady tottered slowly by, "here is Mr. Haxtoun telling me I am not scared by improprieties!"

"I hope you are not scaring *him*, my dear," said Mrs. Esté, who thought that the old gentleman seemed to be encountering some surprise more or less tickling to his sense of enjoyment.

"I think Mrs. Dalton has spirit enough to be introduced into an epic," he rejoined. "I was telling her about the great Aryan epics."

"I used to read Milton's 'Paradise Lost,'" said Mrs. Esté. "Were you going to repeat it to Fanny? She wants a paradise regained, perhaps."

"They might be included in the scheme. I have sometimes thought they ought to be included in the scheme," returned Mr. Haxtoun, thoughtfully; "but

by Milton's day the warm, sensuous, glowing paganism of the primitive mind" —

"There! He is talking about me again!" cried Fanny, and glided off, leaving Mrs. Esté to stem the author's eloquence. She wondered where Medhurst had gone, and peered for a moment into the picture-gallery, where half-a-dozen people were sitting, and Rodney Heriot was standing in front of a Fortuny, talking to Cecil Haxtoun. Fanny did not care to go in, although she saw that Medhurst was there, in the alcove. She cared nothing for art herself, and always laughed when she heard people uttering commonplaces before pictures. She curled her lip at all landscapes, except those of Diaz. She liked figures when they were well done, and had an unerring instinct for a bit of clever painting in flesh or drapery. She wondered what Rodney was saying to Cecil, for whom she had quite an admiration to-day, although at first sight she had thought her merely a slight, juvenile creature. She always admired a woman dressed in good taste, who drew men. It never occurred to her to compare herself with others of her sex. She knew her own powers, and how to use them, and wanted no more. She did not even begrudge Cecil the chance she enjoyed of winning Rodney Heriot. Those advantages belonged to the beautiful age of nineteen. Fanny had had her chance, she told herself, and very bad use she had made of it. She was now twenty-nine, and what she had to do was to gather up the fragments that were left.

Rodney Heriot had found Cecil in an unusual mood to-day. He had never seen her look so deli-

ciously pretty, and the air she wore was as fresh and unspoiled as her dress. She seemed timid before him; her color came and went. Instead of her usual frank, fearless gaze into his face her eyes perpetually drooped, and try as she would to raise the heavy lids and look at him, it was an impossible task.

"Do you like pictures?" Rodney had asked her, as he took her into the gallery.

"I like some very well," she had replied.

"The late inestimable Esté laid out enormous sums in pictures, and some of them are very well done, — regular rich men's pictures, most of them."

"What do you mean by rich men's pictures?"

"Vivid, distinct pictures of the world and the things that are in the world. What did Esté care for thought in his canvases?"

"Is there no thought in these pictures?"

"My words come from the jealous envy of an artist who tried and failed."

"Do you mean that you are an artist?"

"I tried and failed. I studied for eighteen months in a Parisian *atelier*."

"What kind of pictures did you paint?"

"Very bad ones."

"What kind of pictures did you try to paint?"

"It is unkind to ask me. What do you like best, Miss Haxtoun? Do you fancy this Diaz, — the Fontainebleau forest, with the great oak and the open glade in sunshine, the russet and green foliage, and the deep shadows, — or do you prefer this Neuville?"

"I do not like battle-pieces."

"But I fancy you like some life put into a land-

scape; for instance, these excellent cattle, by Troyon."

Cecil said nothing, looked at the cattle, and then away.

"Here is an evening scene of Millet's, and another of Jules Breton's; which do you choose?"

"I could not tell."

"But observe the difference. Millet's gives a mere group of peasants gathering up their potatoes in bags, in a great, flat, open field, with a dull sky bending over it. Don't you feel the silence, the loneliness, the grimness, bareness, hideousness of the lives of those men and women, with their uncouth forms and their hard faces? There is hardly any vivid color, and the picture is certainly not decorative. You may exert what imagination you possess to fill out those limitless horizons, where a few stunted shrubs are cut dully against the gray sky, but the figures themselves deny that life contains any of the enchantments of promise and hope, anything save toil and sleep, and a dull misery under both. Now look at Breton, and observe what a pretty, human idea he has, and how nobly he has treated it. The sunset is as fine as that you had when you went rowing up the river, the other night, and see how it is reflected on that young girl's face, which kindles as at a kiss."

Cecil had flushed slightly, but, rallying, she said, looking at Rodney out of the corners of her dark eyes, that "she thought he at least preferred the Millet."

"I never take the trouble to have preferences. Let each tell his own tale and in his own way.

Here is a Munkacsy and there a Meissonnier, strong pieces of realism, and masterpieces of art. But how do you like this Corot?"

"Tell me about it, Mr. Heriot," said Cecil, softly.

"But what is there to tell? It is all there, — the still pool, with the reflections of the faintly flushed evening sky, and a glimpse of the sunset through the interlaced branches of the trees; the grasses and sedge bending towards the water; the deep shadows under the bank, the dead log half submerged; the path leading out from the woods, and the boy driving home a few sheep, which huddle together in the dark. The idea of evening interpenetrates every twig and branch and blade of grass. The nightingales will sing presently. All nature beckons on to the enjoyment of pure bliss and — lumbago."

Rodney could play any part for a little time, but, once at home in it, he experienced a desire to exaggerate, even to caricature it. He could hardly restrain himself now from talking the wildest nonsense to the young girl, who was listening to him as she had never listened before. It occurred to him it would be a clever joke to lead her up to a group of Bouguereau's soft, shapely nymphs, bathing in a forest nook, and point out their beauties; and to strangle this inclination and keep himself guarded and within bounds was as heroic a piece of self-denial as he had achieved for many a day.

"Aren't you tired of this eternal gloaming?" he asked. "Let us look at something else. Either one is bored and goes to sleep in the twilight, or one is haunted by the fancy of some happiness out of

one's reach. Moonlight, starlight, night voices, night perfumes, night winds, and night music fill one's soul with frantic horror at times, mocking with a beauty which will not soothe. Night is like a woman."

"Why is night like a woman?"

"It might rest us; it might content us; but it never does, — it only maddens us with dreams."

"I don't understand you at all," said Cecil, gazing at him inquisitively.

"Of course you don't; why should you? You look as if you went to bed every night at nine o'clock and slept till dawn."

"Since I have grown up I sit up late, quite late," declared Cecil, indignantly.

"Did you ever," pursued Rodney, "go into the garden early in the morning, and find freshly opened roses drenched with dew? Or great white lilies, with deep, golden hearts, just unfolding their petals in the stir of the morning breeze? Or have you stooped under a bough of sweetbrier, and seen the blossoms against a background of blue sky?"

"No," replied Cecil, wonderingly.

"You are like the morning, not like night," said Rodney, who had been looking at her with a heavy gaze, which oppressed her, but now turned it away. "Come over here and see this Madrazo," he went on. "It will take the taste of the Corot out of our mouths, so that we can go back and talk to every-day people. There is no sentiment here; no sylvan sense; no nature, — all is false, artificial; poisonous flowers, deceitful love, a wild, eager thirst for pleasure. Look at the pretty women, with their gay

dresses of satin, silk, and gauze. See that arch face above that fan! Confess, now, that you find this brilliant civilization intelligible. Do you love to dance?"

"Dearly."

He looked at her. "I don't like to think of you in a ballroom like this, with these clever, trained women. It would delight me to see you dance; yet it would shock me to the soul to see you love it as some women do."

"I have been to three balls, and have danced every time."

"We must have a ball for you. You have looked at enough pictures, I am sure. There are too many of them. There ought never to be more than six in one room. I hate collections; don't you?"

"I never had a collection of anything, so I have always hated not to have collections."

"Do you want all the things you have not had?"

"Every one; I should hate to miss anything."

Rodney looked at her, his clever face full of mischief.

"One of these days somebody will offer you a key, and say, 'Here, mademoiselle, is the key which will turn the wards and open the great treasure-house of the world to you.' Then you will accept it with a little courtesy, and come immediately into the possession of a new heaven and a new earth."

"I doubt very much whether I should be so submissive and grateful," said Cecil. "I have heard about Bluebeard's chamber, and should prudently reply, 'Thanks; I very much prefer not to go rummaging into places which do not belong to me.'"

Rodney burst out laughing. Her answer was immensely piquant to him.

"It seems to me a pity," said he, "that I have to give you up and go and offer my arm to an old woman, to take her out to luncheon."

"To my mamma, perhaps."

"No, indeed. I delight in your mamma; if not the rose, she lives so near the rose she is worth picking. No, it is Mrs. Croome, — the one with the red nose and the crumpled gown. She is both a stranger and a magnate, I believe."

"She is my great-aunt."

"I thought it likely you were connected with her, and that was the reason I unburdened myself; and I give you leave to abuse any of my relations in return."

"I might say something candid about Mrs. Esté's son."

"Do. I would give half of what I don't possess to know what you thought of me."

"Then I shall not tell you."

"Oh, but do! Did you ever think about me at all?"

"Yes; I did, to-day."

"What did you think?"

"That it was as somebody told me."

"What did somebody tell you?"

"That you had interesting things to tell."

"Who said that?"

"Mr. Medhurst."

The name jarred on Rodney. He had fairly succeeded in rousing Cecil out of her languid and listless mood. She had many a time turned towards

him with her indescribable smile. She was not so arch and mischievous as usual, and he preferred this more self-conscious mood. But this allusion to Medhurst spoiled it all.

"I would rather have you gain your impressions of me at first hand," he said, in a low voice. "If you are willing to know me I will lay my heart and soul bare before you."

Cecil grew pale and drew herself to her full height. Her young face took an intensely indignant look, and the glance she gave Rodney was far from tender.

He did not hammer down his stroke.

"Medhurst has a chance of going back to his early love, now," said he. "He and Mrs. Dalton were engaged for five years, and then she flung him over for a rich man, whom she married, and who left her poor."

Cecil listened intently.

"Is that true?" she asked, with a peculiar glance.

"Oh, yes! I have it from one of the principal parties in the affair. To be candid, she told me; and Medhurst had already given me an inkling of his experience. I don't think he has outlived it; and, anyway —

"'On revient, on revient toujours
À ses premiers amours.'"

Mrs. Haxtoun had been looking for Cecil with discreet zeal, and now approached the trio. Luncheon was just about to be announced, she said, with a smile, to Rodney, and he must not neglect his duties.

Rodney had no alternative, and hurried away to the old lady, whom he hoped to call his own great-aunt before many months. He had been growing more and more deeply in love with Cecil every hour. She was so beautiful to-day: he looked at her with a kind of despair, he longed for her so; at the thought of repulse from her, he now began to experience a sense of dread. He tore himself away from her with regret.

Mrs. Croome had heard that Rodney was attentive to her grand-niece, and felt it her duty to put her possible grand-nephew through a catechism in morals and behavior, and by a judicious course of questionings, plied incessantly in the pauses between her plates of croquettes, salads, and boned turkey, restored Rodney to his usual equipoise. He gave her his biography with a few incisive touches, which left little to be desired in the way of suggestiveness. He allowed her to understand that he had, in all places and at all times, taken the religion of the country he was in for his own, with its habits and customs, — had lived chiefly in the East, and longed to return there. He found indescribable zest in the sight of the horror growing in her face, and was at no loss to understand the struggle going on in her mind between her revolt at his confessions and her assured belief that he was a desirable *parti* for Cecil.

"I'm afraid you're something of a sinner," she said, finally, holding her third glass of Bordeaux to her lips. "What you need is a wife to reform you."

"I've always heard the fair sex is never averse

to the task of reforming a sinner," said he. "But how about the three wives I have got already?"

Meanwhile Mrs. Haxtoun and Cecil had sat down near Mrs. Esté, who was drinking *bouillon* and listening to Mr. Haxtoun, who was giving her a ghastly account of his troubles from dyspepsia. The old gentleman had been having a very good time indeed. Mrs. Esté, after a few little sallies, had proved quite submissive; and, allowed for once in his life a fair start, he had enlightened her concerning the entire history of his great undertaking; while she continued to gaze at him as if fascinated, his intricacies seeming to be her delight, and his mysteries her most pleasing study. From the commanding pinnacle whence he looked down at her he had contemplated the little interruptions of people, coming and going and offering comments, without discomposure, and had held his course straight on until he took her out to luncheon. Here other thoughts suggested themselves, and he began to tell her of the impediments which hindered too easy a success.

It must be confessed the old gentleman looked guilty when his wife approached. Mrs. Esté greeted mother and daughter with rapture, and made a place for Cecil close beside her.

"What will you have, *ma belle?*" she asked, summoning everybody within reach. "You don't want *bouillon*. You are of the age when anything can be eaten."

"A most dangerous practice," said Mr. Haxtoun, solemnly. "Cecil, I advise you especially to avoid

anything iced on a warm day like this, — it might give you a chill."

"I particularly long for a chill, papa," said Cecil; "I am so warm."

"That is what it is to be young," cried Mrs. Esté, with a little admiring shriek. "Violent contrasts, swift alternatives, dabbling first in one element and then in the other, — above all, a little suspicion of running risks and courting dangers. Youth delights in all these, and does not know how time is preparing its revenges. At one time I used to live on birds and a salad *mayonnaise*. Now, my poor old organs will not take the trouble to digest anything except broth and milk."

"A cup of hot water, — just as hot as you can drink it, — sipped slowly," put in Mr. Haxtoun, "will obviate much"—

"Mr. Haxtoun is always anxious to prescribe what has failed in his own case," said his wife, feeling that her duty in this emergency was, at any cost, to stem the tide of her husband's eloquence. "It was so good of your son, Mrs. Esté," she proceeded, "to take the trouble to show Cecil the best pictures in the gallery."

"Quite the labor he delights in, I fancy. And did you like the pictures, my dear?"

"Oh, yes," said Cecil.

"Poor Mr. Esté took such a pleasure in buying everything which might please me," sighed the widow. "Nowadays I am as unimportant as a figure on a screen; but my husband never thought me so. He would ransack Europe to find a novelty for me. If you want to be happy," she added to Cecil,

"have a husband who adores you, and who is so rich he can satisfy all your little whims."

Medhurst had been standing at a little distance, but now thought proper to approach the group, and make, at least, a bow to Mrs. Haxtoun and Cecil, whom he had not before met that day. He was struck by something unusual in the glance of the young girl. She raised her eyes, and looked at him steadily, as if wishing to read clearly whatever was evident in his face and manner. There was something both serious and proud in her air; something between indignation and reproach in her gaze. She looked superbly handsome; but he had a sense of something menacing and portentous in her mood, as if she had been shaken to the bottom of her soul and longed to inflict pain on others. She bowed to Medhurst, and Mrs. Haxtoun addressed him with especial graciousness.

"So you and Mrs. Dalton are cousins!" she said, rather archly.

"So it seems," replied Medhurst. "We called the same good man uncle years ago. That makes us cousins."

"I congratulate you very much," pursued Mrs. Haxtoun. "It will be quite delightful to have an old friend in the neighborhood. It is very dull for you with us."

In fact, Mrs. Haxtoun felt lighter of heart than she had done for many a day. Mrs. Dalton had not only shown her interest in this excellent, but superfluous, young man, but had also displayed some zeal in attracting him to her by palpable signs of the link between them.

"A very handsome woman, that Mrs. Dalton," said Mrs. Haxtoun, with the air of a connoisseur.

"Magnificent eyes," said Mrs. Esté; "it must be a sensation to look into them. I am an old woman, and no longer dangerous myself, but I love to see one of those thorough-bred young women. It is the *jeune fille* like you, Cecil, who touches the heart; but the woman of thirty conquers the head, — and men have no hearts nowadays. They like handsome toilettes, wit, and grace. It is easy to talk to a woman like Fanny, — no necessity for burrowing into the earth or soaring into the air for subjects. What she thinks about is the man before her, and what she intends him to think about is herself. Fanny is very easy to get on with."

Medhurst listened with an air of not understanding the subject.

"I admire your wood-carvings very much, Mrs. Esté," he now remarked, looking at the black oaken *buffet*.

"The figures frightened me last winter, when I was here all alone, grinning and gnashing their teeth at me, — the monsters!"

"This dining-room is superb," Medhurst remarked to Cecil.

"Yes," she answered distinctly; "the whole house is more beautiful than any I was ever in."

"*Todo está á la disposicion de V. M.* At your disposal, my dear, as the Spaniards say," exclaimed Mrs. Esté. "It needs a charming young *châtelaine*."

"It ought not to go begging for one," said Medhurst, who felt indescribably nettled, without choosing to define the reason of his irritation. He was

smiling, nevertheless, and his glance rested on Cecil for a moment meaningly.

She sprang up. "Dear Mrs. Esté," said she, "may I not show Mr. Medhurst about? I know the house so well, and I should like to point out its beauties to him."

"Certainly, my dear."

"But, Cecil," put in Mrs. Haxtoun, "you are taking it for granted that Mr. Medhurst is at leisure."

"Oh, do not fear, mamma!" said Cecil, with a charming little movement. "Mrs. Dalton is in the corner with Alec, and Mr. Medhurst is quite disengaged."

A little while before Cecil had been indolent and haughty, but now she was alive to her finger-tips. She moved on a little before Medhurst, who could compare the pride and grace of her movement only to that of a thorough-bred, who rears and paws the ground under the curb. She led the way across the hall to the parlors without saying a word, and he followed, perplexed, and almost pained. If this were society he wanted no more of it. It seemed to him as if, since he came to the house, every sensitive spot in his heart and mind had been pierced with little arrows, — pretty, feathered things, aimed surely and sent deep. He was in accord with nothing and no one. He was not flexible or mobile enough to get along with these people; he had brooded over certain thoughts for years, and given them a sort of sacredness, which made it impossible to allude to them; his spiritual life was entirely individual. Then, intellectually, he had crammed

himself with ideas and facts which might be useful to him in his career, pigeon-holing them, as it were, in his mind, but they made no material for conversation. The stiff, machine-like movement of his mental processes gave no response to the easy dialogue which went on at every hand without effort or abruptness. His impulses of liking and disliking, his sympathies, his careless thoughts, which vibrated and undulated through his brain perpetually, he had taught himself to check, and never to give them expression. He felt at an utter disadvantage, and longed to be away. He had experienced a momentary wish to approach Cecil; but he regretted it now. Whatever she had been the other night, to-day she was haughty and scornful. Perhaps it was just as well; it had needed this experience to make him entirely calm, and allow the vivid impression she had made upon his imagination to fade entirely away. Mrs. Esté had almost claimed her as her daughter in his presence, and the young girl had accepted the position with alacrity. She had wanted to show him with what a regal setting her young beauty was to be enhanced. He felt stiff and proud, and looked so.

The parlors were very light and airy in their effect. A dado of the palest gold, with a procession of figures from Greek vases, was set off by walls and ceiling of delicate azure. There were no heavy hangings; the draperies were all of exquisite lace; the rugs on the inlaid floors were, however, of the richest tints, and threw the paler hues into the most perfect relief.

"The cabinets here are not only very beautiful,

but they are very rare and costly," said Cecil. "It is worth while to look at them."

"The general effect is enough for me. I like the sparkle and splendor; the room is fit for a queen."

"The little nooks are so perfectly finished. Come and sit down here a moment. Could anything be more perfect? Look at the vistas through those arches! Every beautiful effect has been studied. Mr. Esté had a mind for details."

"And for the *tout ensemble* as well. Did you ever see the man?"

"Oh, frequently! They came here regularly every April; then in June Mrs. Esté went to Europe, but returned in September, and stayed here until towards Christmas. The house was frequently full of visitors, and they were very gay. It was before I went out."

"Did you like Mr. Esté?"

"He was only so high," said Cecil, raising her little hand to a height of about four feet six inches from the floor. "He looked like a monkey; chattered and gesticulated like one. He was incessantly in motion, and wanted something to be going on. He seemed entirely foreign both in looks and manner."

"He and his step-son did not get on well."

"So I have heard. Mr. Heriot was always in Europe, and when Mrs. Esté went abroad he used to join her at her villa near Lago Maggiore."

"Mr. Esté did not accompany her?"

"Never. He used to say he could not afford to be more than three hours' distance from Wall street."

"The whirligig of time brings strange revenges, since all this man's wealth is now almost in his step-son's grasp."

"Mr. Heriot often alludes to that."

The two were sitting down face to face in deeply cushioned chairs, one of pale blue and the other of gold embossed satin. Medhurst had said to himself that she seemed to be doing the honors as if she had been three years married. He burned to say something which should show her how deep an impression her assumption of ownership made on him, and yet how insignificant he thought an ambition which culminated merely in this. But he could think of nothing incisive enough which at the same time was not a little harsh.

"Mr. Heriot has seen a good deal," he remarked. "He has tried a good many occupations; but he will settle down comfortably now, and a year hence will say that hitherto he has had no enjoyment."

"You like Mr. Heriot very much, do you not?'

"I do; I assure you I do." His eyes met hers, and he smiled significantly.

She sprang up, flushing. "We must go on to the library while the crowd is still in the dining-room," she said.

He followed her movement. "I really do not know what the need of a library is in a house like this," he exclaimed.

"Would you have no library?"

"I say I cannot see the need of a library in a house like this. Books are for the poor, the lonely, and the unhappy."

She looked at him questioningly.

"How about pictures?"

"Oh, they are decorative. Walls are empty spaces unless filled in some way. But while you sat in that blue chair, against the tortoise-shell cabinet, covered with the blue china, I thought to myself, 'This is the true work of art. What Boldini or Zamacois could paint this?'"

"That is a very pretty compliment. If I lived in a home like this" —

"When you live in a home like this," he interrupted.

"I would try to put out the most vivid pictures. After all, there is no movement, no change, in a painting. The artist may have chosen a happy moment; but it is only a moment. One tires of it, and longs for a new impulse, a fresh suggestion."

"No one will ever tire of you, Miss Haxtoun. Your art has no boundaries, no limitations. You live in a perfect whirlwind of devices and caprices."

She smiled at him defiantly.

"This is the library," she now announced; "according to you, a superfluous room in this house. I fancy Mr. Heriot does not think so yet."

"No, — not quite yet."

He gave the four words all the meaning of which they were capable.

"He has his piano here, and his violin," said Cecil. "It seems Mrs. Dalton is a clever pianist, and she accompanies him. They practise the 'Kreutzer Sonata.' I suppose you have heard Mrs. Dalton play."

"Except for her playing I should have known little or nothing of music."

"Does she play well?"

"I hardly remember. What I do remember is that she practised endlessly. She was ambitious to excel in music. Whatever she touches she is impatient to perfect herself in, or used to be; and I thus became familiar with the music she studied, and any strain of it to this day comes charged with a meaning far greater than its own, and expresses what is absolutely individual to me, and unintelligible to others."

Cecil was looking at him; she had grown a little pale and languid.

"Will you come on to Mrs. Esté's *boudoir*, or have you seen enough?" she asked, with all the spirit flatly gone out of her face and her voice.

"I have seen enough to be convinced that the house is very beautiful. It is rather a vain and bitter jest to go on showing such luxury to a poor man. How do you know that the sight of it does not inspire communistic rancor against Heriot?"

Even if Cecil had cared to answer she had no time, for Rodney Heriot and Mrs. Dalton were close beside them.

"Miss Haxtoun was kindly showing me the splendors of your house," said Medhurst, addressing Rodney.

"My house? It is not my house at all," Rodney replied.

"I wish it were mine," said Mrs. Dalton.

"Not having it at my disposal I cannot offer it to you," said Rodney. "Otherwise" — He finished with a low bow.

"Mr. Heriot," said Cecil, interrupting.

He turned to her instantly.

"Will you take me to mamma?" she asked, with an absolutely infantile imperiousness; and when he offered his arm she took it at once, and, without a glance at the others, walked away.

"That little girl is rude to me," said Mrs. Dalton to Medhurst. "I wonder why? Is she always rude, or is it because she is annoyed? Does she fancy I am going to rob her of her rich lover?"

Medhurst was looking after the two as they walked down the room together.

"I beg pardon," he said, dreamily.

"What, — are you in love with her too?" Fanny asked, with her low laugh.

"I?" exclaimed Medhurst. "I am not invariably in love with girls who are making rich marriages. Is she engaged to Heriot, do you know?"

"Oh, no! — I fancy not. Indeed, from what I have seen and heard, I had supposed she was inclined to hold him off. But this does not look so. Perhaps she may be jealous of me, and feels it important to secure him. Do you think she cares about him?"

"Diamonds, not hearts, are trumps, I fancy," replied Medhurst; "and in that case it is doubly important, is it not, in case of doubt, to take the trick?"

But even while he said it he half hated himself for the cynicism. He longed to be away, and made his excuses at once. He did not get away, however, until he had made an engagement to walk with Fanny the next morning.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. DALTON TAKES A MORNING WALK.

MRS. DALTON had looked forward to reëstablishing her power easily over Medhurst. Ten years before she had obtained a complete ascendency over him, when he was a mere boy and she a mature woman, three years his senior; and it was one of her fixed beliefs that masculine passion is eternal. She knew the lack of any durability in her own feelings, which were mere knots of ribbon, which she adjusted here or there, just as they were useful or becoming; but, with an irresistible feminine instinct, she went on counting on the permanence of any sentiment she had excited. He had been in love with her once; and, in spite of his youth, there had been something about his appeal which had forced her to listen. They became engaged, and if he had not left her, to study at Heidelberg for eighteen months, it is possible that she might have become his wife. When he came back, however, he soon knew that it was all over. Fanny put the case before him with sufficient distinctness. He was poor, and was likely to remain too poor to marry; while wealth and position were absolutely essential to her. The six years since they parted, shortly before her marriage to Edward

Dalton, seemed to her very short and very ineffectual years. Her marriage had been a disappointing experience: a day, an hour, a minute, even, she told herself, had shown her that she had made a mistake. She had married a broker, who was, at the time of her meeting him, rich. His marriage was the end of his run of good luck; he never was rich any more, and, three years after taking a wife, he saw nothing before him save getting himself out of the world as quietly and expeditiously as possible, in order to avert certain uncomfortable exposures. Mr. Esté had been wronged by the dead man; but Mr. Esté could be very generous when he chose, and when his wife told him he must do nothing to make Fanny unhappy, he quietly paid over a certain amount of money, and nobody ever knew just what a forger and embezzler Edward Dalton had been. The suicide had made some details for the morning and evening papers for two days, and it might seem strange that Medhurst, who was in the way of such news, had not known that the man was Fanny Blake's husband. But probably Medhurst's wildest imaginations would never have compassed the idea that the man who had the happiness to be her husband could have taken himself out of the world in such a way. Mrs. Esté had been friendly to the young widow, ever since making her a companion in journeys to Europe, and at all times when she needed efficient help and companionship. Fanny understood very well that she was not to enjoy such advantages for nothing, and that it was not worth her while to jeopardize them by any sort of behavior Mrs. Esté did not like. For instance, although Mrs. Esté had a marriageable

son, Fanny was not to flirt with him except within bounds. The old lady had extraordinary subtlety in such matters, and could distinguish with the utmost nicety between flirtations of the head and those of the heart. Everything was permitted up to a certain point, but it must cease there. Fanny could carry out these views better than women of a more ardent and less restrained temperament. But these perpetual warnings had given Rodney Heriot a certain value in her eyes. She had liked his fight to the end with his step-father; she always liked a brilliant rebel, who never yields, and finally gets more than he ever asked for. And was not Rodney this child of good luck? She liked him, too, because he lacked discipline; she hated a man, she declared, of whom one could predict to a certainty what he would do. Fanny was, in fact, misled by a woman's unreason and by her temperament; she mistook almost always the theatrical for the dramatic, and the high-sounding for the noble. When she had produced an effect herself she felt that something had been achieved, and when she in turn was moved by anything striking she called it great. Thus she understood by instinct one side of Rodney Heriot's mind without in the least degree mastering the other. It always seemed to her they were in complete sympathy, because he talked to her with the most absolute freedom, with the same absence of illusion, the same allusions to actual experience, as if she had been a man, never using formulas or circumlocutions. Rodney had repeatedly told her that he hated etiquette and the starch of society; that he had never been able quite to distinguish between mere conventionalism and

necessary restriction; that he liked, in fact, to gambol on all fours, if he chose. She had humored him ever since. She was the most fastidious of women where any detail of feminine behavior was concerned. She never touched wine. She maintained an exquisite refinement in even her brilliant mobility; she was absolutely circumspect; but intellectually she gave herself plenty of latitude, and was not easily shocked. She and Rodney met on the footing of a man and woman of the world. The difference between them was that she treated everything like a toy which was offered for her amusement, while he broke it open, to see what was inside.

She felt that she understood Rodney; the man whom she did not understand was Medhurst. She had been candidly delighted with the idea of meeting him again. She said to everybody that he was her best-loved cousin, and at their encounter she had treated him like a cousin. She had felt that to see him here in the country, where one was thankful for any boon, might be a pleasure, almost an excitement. But he was not pliable to opportunity; he obstinately refused to accept the *rôle* she thrust upon him. He had always, she remembered, been of stiff clay, and not too easily moulded. She was anxious, however, to discover just what was in his mind about her, and looked forward to the appointed interview with some eagerness. She told Mrs. Esté before retiring that she had promised to walk with her cousin, who had no time to give her except the early morning hours. Mrs. Esté had no objection. She thought it was likely to give anybody a long day

to rise at half-past five; to be up at nine o'clock had imposed upon the poor old lady some terribly endless mornings.

Fanny was standing at the stile when Medhurst came down the Haxtouns' garden, the fifth of July, and at the sight of her he paused and pulled out his watch. "I thought I was not late," said he.

"Of course it ought to be you who were waiting, but nothing happens exactly as it did in my youth," said Fanny. "Having waked up too early I thought I might as well come out. There is always something unreal to me about the beauty of a summer morning, when all the world is asleep."

"By all the world you mean the few men and women who live in fine houses. Nature does not reserve herself for them."

"I confess," remarked Fanny, laughing, "that my powers of imagination are not equal to the task of imagining nature going on when I am not. Can you conceive, for instance, that Niagara is thundering over the precipices at this moment, or that the Alps are turning pale after the golden shimmer of dawn has died away? When I come away everything stops for me."

"I never considered that the Alps took it seriously to heart when the tourist season was over. One might imagine them saying to each other, 'Now that the ant-race has passed we will have some fine moments together.'"

"That sounds so exactly like you, Frank. You never flattered me nor called my nonsense agreeable. If I had made my last speech to Rodney Heriot, he

would have said, 'Charming egotist!' and added that naturally everything fell to pieces in my absence."

"Having lived six years away from you, going through my own course of transformations in lonely grandeur, I have solved the problem of how well nature does this when you are not looking on."

"I am not so sure that you have thriven in the process. You have grown thin; you have lost those boyish good looks which every one used to admire. There is a little frown between your brows. Your voice is dryer. Formerly, your smile was open and sunny. I cannot see that you ever smile nowadays."

Medhurst laughed a little at all this. They had continued to stand at the stile, and now he vaulted over.

"Where shall we go?" said he, — "through yonder woods, to the quarries?"

"I know nothing about the place. We have driven about a little, but you may fancy that old Mrs. Este's charioteer is no Jehu. The least jolt shakes her to pieces."

They entered the woods, which the sun, still less than an hour high, filled with curious effects of light: here and there night seemed still to hold its own in the heavy shadows, and again drops of dew on the shining leaves caught the low beams and blazed like jewels, while from every thicket came vibrating flashes of prismatic radiance.

"The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds"

had not yet wholly died away. On every side were

heard the confused beginnings of their daily toil. They were in incessant motion, darting hither and thither, and seeming to put a breeze into the leaves of the oaks and beeches, keeping up all the time a light-hearted, and not unmusical, twittering.

The situation roused a feeling not unlike pain in Medhurst, — a presentiment that something was gone from him forever. As they walked on deeper and deeper into the wood, every now and then pushing aside the green sprays which, in their unpruned luxuriance of June growth, met across the path, enclosing the two constantly in a little world of radiant green all their own, — he could not help trying to call up a fragment of the feeling he would have had years before alone in such a scene with Fanny. To be with her then, out of sight and hearing of others, had been a reason for pure ecstasy. Once they halted for a moment and sat down on the trunk of a tree to watch a gray rabbit nibbling a clover-blossom in the distance, and they could smell the fresh fragrance of some hidden flowers; while a ray of sunlight, piercing through the maples, lit up the mosses and lichens at the foot of a great oak. A soft air stirred in the boughs above, parting the upper branches, and giving glimpses of soft, fleecy clouds sailing across the azure. A thrush began to sing, not six yards away; they could see his throat swell as the song burst forth, — then came his prolonged sweet call to his mate. In the old time Fanny's presence would have been a matter of richer import to him than the beauty of the morning; but now a feeling of intense joy in the simple fact of living had nothing to do with her at all.

Once or twice some exclamation almost burst from his lips, but he repressed it. He knew she could invent a good phrase, but he did not care for phrases. Without thought or volition of his own a wonder floated to his mind whether Cecil Haxtoun had ever been here in the early morning. Cecil would care more for it than this clever, trained woman, who sat at his side, talking occasionally with a gentle languor which left him unmoved.

"Let us go on," she said, presently. "It is horribly damp here." She held up a little French shoe. "I put on my thickest boots," she added; "but they do not withstand this soaked mould."

"I had forgotten," Medhurst exclaimed, starting up. "We will go on. It is well to be a little careful here," he added, as they took the path again. "The banks of this brook are rather treacherous." He helped her across the narrow water-course which wound through the elders and hazels. She did not let go his arm after they were over, but held on to it, and looked up into his face.

"Have I not heard," said she, "that a witch loses her power to charm, if she crosses running water?"

"Ah, you tremble for yours, do you?"

"I had lost it before," she exclaimed, in a different tone from that she had used hitherto. "I am no witch where you are concerned, Frank."

The ferns had grown so tall on either hand that to push their way along the path had now become difficult. He had no choice but to drop her hand from his arm, and to lead the way along the narrow, winding path, green with moss, strewn with leaves,

and lighted by but few glimpses of the outer radiance, through the almost impenetrable thicket. Presently they emerged into a cleared opening, where they found the sward dotted with solemn young robins, abroad for their breakfast, and a little beyond the last borders of the wood rose the jagged cliffs of a quarry. It opened towards the south, and Medhurst and Mrs. Dalton, a little chilled by their long walk through the shadows of the wood, went towards a sunny corner and sat down. The clear blow of a hammer rang cheerily through the wide silences of the early morning.

"Somebody searching for fossils, I fancy," said Medhurst.

"I have heard of rocks which disclosed the tropical flowers of a former period," said Fanny; "but, after meeting you, I doubt the truth of such traditions."

"Do I seem dull to you, Fanny?" asked Medhurst, as if suddenly waking up.

"Dull is hardly the word."

"Well, forgive me. But, then, consider what lifeless days I spend. I go to bed too late to be ready to wake early, and as soon as I have dressed and breakfasted I am at the desk again. And such a task! Not arduous, — not demanding any of my actual powers, — but stupefying, depressing, endless, giving me perpetual nightmares of mountains piled above me. From seven till nine in the evening I have a little respite, but it is not often I can escape from my bondage. Some petty, persistent thought is apt to goad me incessantly, so that I am glad to be back at my work again."

"What sort of a persistent thought?" demanded Fanny.

"Sometimes a mere quibble, — conflicting authorities or the like; again, the thought that, as a man who wants to do honest work, I have no right to be here; that I ought either to accept my task or reject it. I feel often like a hypocrite of hypocrites. A wave of shame and regret rushes over me, and I long to be free of it. But then I have a sort of pity for Mr. Haxtoun. I reflect that few men are so fortunate as to be in absolute sympathy with their masters. Mine is satisfied with me; accordingly I plod along as best I can. I accepted the service for money, and I get my wages. You see what delightful problems of life mine are. I don't revolve fine, abstract questions; I simply shoulder the incubus of this terrible book, and try to carry it as best I may."

Fannie had listened to him with little change of face; but, in spite of her effort to hold her features to their former look of caressing entreaty, a peculiar and indefinable difference of expression came into her lips and eyes. She seemed surprised, and the feeling was entirely ingenuous; she was surprised to find how little she counted for in Medhurst's mental world. Rodney Heriot had told her of Medhurst's allusion to a time in his life, six years before, and she had unhesitatingly accepted it as clear proof that her old dominion was waiting to be reëstablished. Her first ardent lover is never forgotten by any woman, and his promises are the gauge for other men's performances, and his vows the test of their constancy. She had felt certain that Medhurst would always continue to love her. There are cer-

tain beliefs in the world that are accepted without comparison with actual data; and one is, that first love is one of the three great experiences of life: first, birth, then love, then death. Fanny recalled this to her mind now, and said to herself that Medhurst must be acting this indifference; that he was still angry with her; that not even her present widowhood had taken the sting out of the wound she had given his pride. She regained her self-command with a little exultation. For a moment everything had been slipping away from her. She had felt old, loveless, and lonely. Everything had failed. She had had a bitter sense of the humiliating tragedy of her married life, which she did not often look in the face; of her uncertain position; of her friendlessness. But, when she assured herself that he was merely carrying out a part his pride had imposed upon him, the pendulum swung back. Medhurst had been looking at Fanny, and had wondered why her eyes shone with such strange brilliancy, and why her cheeks and lips had grown pale; but even while he was pondering the question she all at once resumed her usual expression.

"I have been boring you," he exclaimed. "There is nothing very exciting or picturesque about my troubles."

"I am interested in everything about you," she said, with considerable intensity. "Cannot you imagine what it is to hear you talk again, — how it brings back all my lost and happy time? I cannot help wondering what sort of feelings are reawakened in you, seeing me again." She had fastened her eyes on his. He could not avert his own.

"I could hardly tell you," he returned, speaking as if under the pressure of necessity.

"When you heard I was here your feeling was not one of pure pleasure."

"Very far from it!"

"You hated me still for waking you from that old, enthusiastic dream, and substituting a rankling disappointment."

"Do not fancy that," cried Medhurst. "As I told you then, I never wanted you to feel that you had done wrong. I wanted you to choose your own life. It seemed to me at the time you were making a mistake. I believed in my own powers, and could not have accepted anybody's prediction that I was to be thwarted and humiliated at every turn. Afterwards, when repeated hard knocks had told me the prizes of life were not to be secured too easily, I began to be thankful that you, at least, had been shrewd and clear-sighted. I was glad I had not pulled you down into the mire with me."

She had grown pale again. She bit her lip, and something sweet, sad, and supplicating had come into her face.

"That was the way you thought of me then, — you were glad I was not encumbering your way; that" —

"Do not misunderstand me, Fanny," interrupted Medhurst, touched to the quick.

"But that is what you said. You rejoiced that you were free of me."

"Just think of what you had been to me all the time I was growing up. You were my first inspiration, — I might say my last; for Heaven knows no

star has shone for me since. From the time I was a little fellow of twelve, and you used to come to Uncle Tom's, you were to me like nobody else in the world. You were so tall and slim; your curls were so bright, your eyes so radiant, you were Venus and Helen, Athene and Diana, to me. I never read a verse of poetry about girl, woman, or goddess, but that it brought up the thought of you. In fact, poetry and romance seemed to have been created to describe you, since no every-day speech could do it. That was when I was a little fellow, whom you used to order about, cajole, command, deride. By the time I was seventeen you took notice of me. I was tall enough to give you my arm. I had wit enough to make you willing to talk to me. Good heavens, what folly I used to pour out! I have often told myself since that unless you had loved me a little you could not have borne it."

"I did love you more than a little, Frank."

"We are cousins, you say; it was quite proper you should. But a girl's little farthing rushlight of feeling does not light life for her like a man's great sun of love. We were engaged almost five years. I do not suppose there were many waking moments of that time when the suggestion of you did not underlie every thought, word, and act of mine. It was not alone in the softer ways of love, but you were at the root of all my ambition; all the practical details of life, besides all the poetry and romance, meant you. And you say I told you I rejoiced to be free of you. At this moment I feel sorry for myself, Fanny, when I think how I suffered and longed for you."

"Still you were glad I had married somebody else."

"I was glad you had made your choice, and were happy. I said to myself you would have been miserable sharing my lot."

"I was miserable enough in my own life."

"I would rather believe you were happy. I would, indeed. You had cost me a terrible price, and I should prefer to believe you got something for it."

"I don't believe there was a day in all those three years when I did not, in some way, frame the thought, 'If I had married Frank this would never have been!'"

"Was he cruel to you?"

"Cruel? No, if by cruelty you mean that he struck me, or spoke brutally. He simply lived in one world, and let me go my own way in another. He wanted none of my interest and sympathy in his private life, and after one glimpse into it I shut the door upon it, and never asked a question, and tried never to think of what I had seen."

"Do you mean he was untrue to you?"

"No, — I mean he was in a position where he had to try one makeshift after another: it was a life of tricks, shufflings, subterfuges. When I found out that he had no actual means, that everything he made was by his stock-gambling, I never asked him for money. When he had it he gave it to me lavishly, and I used to loathe it then. Afterwards, when I knew all" —

She broke off; her face was dreadful. Medhurst could not endure to look at her. All the youth had

gone shuddering out of her lips and eyes, and she had the look of a fate which destroys.

"I ought never to allude to it," she said, with a shiver. "When I wake up at night, with old thoughts haunting me, I deaden them with chloral. You see I was not so happy as you believed, Frank. If you had known at the time"—

"I think I should have gone mad," said he, quickly, his face turned quite away. "As you say, you ought never to allude to it."

The sun had gone upward with great strides while they sat there, and was now blazing down into the quarry; but until this moment they had not felt the discomfort. They rose simultaneously.

"I suppose we must go back," remarked Fanny, "Must we take that dismal way we came?"

"There is a path by the water's edge. We have to cross half-a-dozen fields to get there."

"It is all very well the coming out," Fanny said, with her usual easy, half-mocking air; "but the going back, bedraggled and overheated, is quite a different matter,—the same difference as between youth and middle life. Life abounds in moral meanings, if one will only accept them."

Medhurst did not answer. The conversation had taken a turn which he thought unfortunate, and he accused himself of weakness in having made confessions, and extracted confessions in return. That he had simply followed Fanny's lead was a fact he did not insist on to himself. What he was conscious of was a certain blankness of emotion where Fanny was concerned. He had heard her say she had per-

petually thought of him, without a throb of that delicious pain he would have counted on at such a crisis. A certain definiteness of idea as to where he stands is essential to a man's self-respect; he cannot gaze into unmapped country as a woman can, her imagination halting before its unknown barriers and boundaries. If he and Fanny were to go on exchanging these retrospective emotions it seemed to put him in a position which constrained his offering her something more tangible for the future. He had, however, no wish to marry her now. The idea was inconceivable to him. If he had been too poor and hopeless for her to marry six years before, he was certainly too utterly poor and hopeless to have become eligible after all youthful glamour had flatly vanished from his landscape, and he saw nothing before him save a wide, dull plain, which he had to cross somehow.

They were skirting the newly mown fields, where the men were tossing open the swathes, which filled the air with a pleasant scent. But the charm of the early morning was quite gone; no more delicate shafts of light shot across cool, green, wet vistas of bough and blossom. The birds still haunted the quiet corners of the meadow, flying off as Medhurst and Mrs. Dalton approached, and stopping on the upper line of the zigzag fences until they had passed. Presently the river was in sight, and a fresh breeze met their faces.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Fanny. "I was getting into a very bad humor, and was beginning to feel like scolding you for bringing me out, first into the wet wood, and afterwards into this fiery

furnace. You remember, perhaps, that when I am uncomfortable I like to make some one suffer."

"The rest of the walk is pleasanter," said Medhurst, resolutely commonplace; "and it was my fault that we chose that path."

"I am just the woman I always was," pursued Fanny, — "always capricious, unreasonable, exacting. Nothing in me has changed, — nothing. Are you glad?"

"Glad?" said Medhurst. "No; I regret it. I wish you might have grown better with all your experiences."

"How could I? What chance have I had? A woman is so weak unless she has the support of a good, wise man. I never could live a solitary, gloomy life. I cannot bear sorrow and despair; still less can I endure doubt and uncertainty. I escape from them like a frightened child from a dark room. Any one who offers me kindness and sympathy, tenderness and affection, I am ready to fall on my knees before and bless."

She turned her eyes towards him, swimming with tears. She was quite carried away by the rush of her own feelings.

"You seemed so cold at first," she went on, eloquently, "I felt as if everything had been swept away from me. I had been looking forward to talking with you frankly, and you — you gazed back at me critically, and seemed to be asking if I were sincere."

"I did not mistrust you, I" —

"You mistrusted yourself," she said, eagerly. "You were afraid lest that old feeling — sweet, pow-

erful, imperious — should come back and govern us both. You might have known yourself, at least, better," she added, with a little cry, which seemed pushed from her by an impulse, sudden and irresistible.

Medhurst passed his hand over his forehead. His heart was beating quickly, and he felt singularly disturbed.

She had stopped short. "Tell me," she now said, holding out both her hands, as if in supplication, "tell me, Frank, when you stopped loving me."

He felt singularly embarrassed. His sensations were so vague they would have kept him silent, had he not felt bound to speak. He was drawn towards Fanny, and yet, at the same moment, he felt angry with her. She had put him in a position where he could hardly be candid. In fact, at this moment, he was not certain what the true answer to her question would have been. But she was trembling; her face was pale and her eyes tearful.

"Fanny," he said, coldly averting his eyes, "one night, about a month ago, I was on the river, and the band on the shore was playing a waltz, — do you remember the waltz Cousin Rebecca used to play for us while we whirled about in the twilight? Well, it seemed to me that night, I had lost nothing, forgotten nothing — I"— He broke off. Their eyes met once, then he withdrew his. His own dislike of his words grew; for, while he uttered them, he had no consciousness of their meaning in his own heart.

They were now approaching Mrs. Esté's grounds, and soon turned in, walking slowly towards the house.

"Do you know," he asked, suddenly turning towards her, "that I have written a book?"

"No. What book?"

"I brought you a copy, but had so far forgotten to give it to you, or even to allude to it. Here it is."

They had reached the upper terrace; he put a little red volume in her hands, lifted his hat, and was off without another word.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE PLAY'S THE THING."

"IF," said Mrs. Dalton to Rodney Heriot, "you were a woman" —

"I never wanted to be a woman," put in Rodney; "but, as you see, I want to be as near a woman as possible." He had been walking up and down the square veranda, shaded by red awnings, with his cigarette, the remains of which he now flung away, while he took a seat close to the rattan lounge, where Mrs. Dalton half-sat, half-reclined, a mass of muslin, lace, and pale-green ribbons.

"If," she pursued, "you were a woman like me" —

"A devilish handsome woman, Fanny, and a well-dressed one; and a clever one besides."

"Thank you!" She proceeded — "and had only about a thousand dollars, all told, a lot of pretty clothes, and a few jewels, what would you do?"

"I should wear my clothes and my jewels, and visit my friends, until I was better off."

"But if there were no prospect of being better off. If you woke up at night and fell a-crying at the thought of a day when no kind friends might" —

"Don't, Fanny! That tone does not suit you. You can be everything except pathetic. You can

domineer the world, fascinate it, bewilder it, move it to mirth and laughter; but you cannot move it to tears. Why don't you marry?"

"Who wants to marry me?"

"I do. I am dying to marry you; but my mother forbids. She comes into my room at night, and begs me to give up my infatuation for you."

"Then there is no chance of such good luck for me," remarked Fanny, with her low laugh.

"How would Medhurst do? Too poor, I suppose. Besides, he is a good, ornamental sort of a lover, — a proper kind of hero. It would be a pity to lose a fellow like that, who will get up at five o'clock, and wet his boots and trousers brushing the dew from off the upland lawns. Does he actually make love to you at that time of day?"

"The idea of anybody's making love before breakfast!"

"Oh, a woman will, — a woman will make love from sunrise till midnight! She is so absolutely unemotional she can afford to simmer in a perpetual low boil of love-making. Where a man thinks of love once, a woman does, on an average, some five hundred times. Did you ever hear the story of the woman who did not want to be kissed?"

"No, tell it to me."

"I see, — you don't in the least believe that such a woman ever existed. This belongs to the Eastern folk-tales; and folk-tales are always absolutely true to nature. A man was once walking along a lonesome road, with an iron pot on his back, carrying in one hand a live chicken by the legs, and in the other a staff, while he led a goat by a string.

Thus burdened, he was having a hard time, and kept wondering to himself how the deuce he was ever going to get to his journey's end with such a load. Suddenly a woman, who was sitting on the bank, sprang up and joined him, telling him she was going the same way, and might as well keep him company. 'All right,' said he; but he found it almost impossible to get strength to answer her questions and respond to her talk, which she poured forth volubly. After a time, as they went on, the road turned and went through a dark and secluded wood. 'Saints, defend me!' cried the woman, uttering shriek after shriek as they entered the place. 'What in the world is the matter?' demanded the man. 'I'm afraid if I go any farther into this solitary path,' said she, 'you may take advantage of my unprotected condition and kiss me.' — 'Kiss you!' exclaimed the man; 'how in the name of the saints am I to find time to kiss a woman while I carry a pot on my back, and a live chicken in one hand, and a staff and a cord in the other?' — 'Oh, nothing could be easier!' she explained. 'All you have to do is to plant your cane in the ground, tie your goat to it by the string, lay your pot on the ground, and put the live chicken under it, and then you would be quite free to carry out your wicked intention of kissing me.' — 'Now Heaven be praised for a woman's ingenuity! I should never have thought of that,' said the man to himself; and accordingly he at once put the staff in the ground, and slipped the leash over it which held the goat, then gave the chicken to the woman to hold while he laid down the pot, and, taking the

chicken from her, covered it up closely. And at last he kissed her."

"That is an abominable story," said Fanny. "That was made by a woman-hater."

"I think it very likely. Most good things were."

"Is it not rather singular that men have always had their witty say about women, and that no woman has yet recorded any really pointed satire against men?"

"I always fancied that you uttered some such things about us when you were together."

"No, we don't. If a woman has a tolerably endurable husband she cackles over it, and a woman with a bad husband holds her tongue, knowing very well that it would all be considered her own fault. Young girls say some severe things against men; but that goes for nothing, as they are entirely unacquainted with the subject."

"It seems a good field for satire," said Rodney. "Take a pretty woman, with a cool, critical way of looking at matters, — like yourself, for instance, — she must derive some amusement from our various exhibitions of absurdity."

"I might if I had a good income. As it is, I have always to be thinking about myself."

"A delightful subject, certainly."

"And it now brings me round to the point where I started from, — what I am to do. What, for instance, should you think of my going on the stage?"

Rodney had so far liked his *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Dalton very well; but he now began to reflect that if she were about to bore him he would plead some engagement, and go out. The reason he was not,

as usual, spending his morning at Rosendale was that Cecil was away for a two days' visit. The time dragged a little, and Mrs. Dalton helped it on so long as she diverted him and kept him from reflections upon the absurdity of his being shut up in a country-house without other resources than the society of people who could not amuse him, and whom he had no desire to amuse.

"We are nowadays so highly civilized," he now remarked, blandly, "that it is not necessary for us to do more than indicate what has been already said, and will be said, on every subject. For an answer to that question, Fanny, I refer you to the first volume of 'Daniel Deronda.'"

"I have read Herr Klesmer on the subject many times," she replied; "and he certainly covers it very well. Still, I am something more than a vain, spoiled child, like Gwendolen, who had never found out that the world did not begin with her and only exist for her sake. Sit still, Mr. Heriot, and let me go through a scene or two from a play."

"Here? Now?"

"Yes; why not? Nobody but the birds can hear or see. Mrs. Esté is taking her *bouillon*" —

"She has finished," called a shrill voice. "She is coming this instant. She has heard every word you have both been saying. Rodney knew I was just there," the old lady went on, now adding the effect of her pretty, shrivelled face to her voice. "You won't mind my hearing you, Fanny. I have seen all the best actresses. There is something in being an old cat with nine lives, as Rodney calls me, — she has time to see a good deal."

The noon was warm, but a light breeze blew from the river, and they were on the west side of the house, and well screened, not only from the light, but from the glare on the water. Just below them were flower-beds, filled with masses of the sweetest flowers, — tea-roses, heliotropes, mignonettes, and alyssums. The bees murmured among them busily and greedily, and now and then the whir of a humming-bird's wing was heard as it poised itself in mid-air, and sipped with its long, slender bill from the heart of the rose.

Mrs. Esté took her seat in a long reclining-chair, which Fanny indicated for her use, and raised a parasol, unfurled a fan, and opened the stopper of a *vinaigrette*. She was never without some of these appurtenances, which she used partly as protectors and barriers, and partly to hide her incessant drowsiness. Having arranged her audience, Fanny, who had hitherto been a shapeless mass of furbelows, surmounted by a blonde frizzle-pate, and a sparkling face lighted by a pair of bright eyes, rose and crossed the veranda. Rodney looked at her with some brightening of curiosity. Her long white muslin gown swept the floor with a grace of its own; the perfect line from the point of the train to the shoulder was just sufficiently broken by the pale ribbon which bound the slender waist. When she turned she looked like a different woman from what she had been five minutes before. Her dark eyes had taken a strange brilliancy, and, as if she had grown pale, the sweetness and purity of her beautiful features seemed suddenly to be cut in the whitest marble. She advanced a little, and, without

a word of explanation or preamble, began reciting "*Les deux pigeons*" from the second act of *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, and put into it not a little charm and pathos.

"Bravo, Fanny!" said Rodney. "That was capitally done. Wait a moment, and let me get the book. I will read Maurice's part for you. Let us take the third act, where Adrienne discovers that Maurice is the Count de Saxe."

Fanny had seen Bernhardt again and again in this *rôle*, and threw into it a little of the charming naturalness and the impassioned womanliness of that accomplished actress.

"If I could only act up to my part!" she said, pausing and giving a slight grimace.

"Do, do!" said Rodney.

"'I will be silent, — I will be silent,'" she went on. "'How will I imprison my joy, my pride! Never will I boast of your love or your glory. I will only admire you openly, like the rest of the world! Others shall celebrate your exploits, but you shall relate them to me. They shall proclaim your grandeur, your titles, but you shall confide to me your sorrows'" —

They went through the scene.

"Do I do it pretty well?" Fanny asked, with apparent nervousness.

"O Lord, yes! Too well. You would alarm me by your talent except that I know you have stolen the art from Bernhardt."

"Try me in *La Dame aux Camélias*, in the scene with Duval," said Fanny.

Rodney obyeed with alacrity, and, under the influ-

ence of a charming surprise, Mrs. Esté gave little bursts of admiration. She shrieked softly; she wept, or at least dabbled her handkerchief in her eyes; and, when they tried *Frou-Frou*, Fanny's success seemed insured.

"But, after all," declared Fanny, "I'm best in comedy. I'll show you Lady Teazle." And she went through a scene with sharp relish of every word in the brilliant dialogue and a peculiar, arch, piquant charm. "There!" said she, "have I any genius? Point out my defects; but let me know if you think I have any genius."

"Hang it, Fanny, nobody has got any genius nowadays!"

"I don't want to go on the stage unless I can be successful. Balzac said he wanted his tragedy to become the breviary of kings and peoples. I want to make people happy and to make them miserable, — to send women home in tears, and men with a feeling that for once they have realized what Romeo felt for Juliet, what Antony for Cleopatra."

"You are tolerably ambitious, certainly."

"Life has become so mechanical, — so passionless! Literature no longer moves people. The stage is all that remains to show men and women the ideal."

"Heaven help us then!"

"But have I genius?"

"You certainly did those things very well."

"I do not doubt that there are all sorts of difficulties to overcome; but, with a little hope and help, they need not inspire despair. But tell me what you think. I want to carry the world before me or else keep on in private life."

Rodney looked at her with an indefinable smile.

"You want success," said he, "when you should desire the rewards art can give you."

"I want money, and I want glory."

"You may be able to get both. You may succeed in attaining neither, but pass your life in feeling thwarted desires, miserable jealousies, cruel pangs of disappointment. Who knows?"

"How unsatisfactory you are!"

"Why shouldn't I be? Haven't I tried everything, and failed? I have always had two frantic desires, — one was to achieve something; the other was to be loved devotedly. But nothing ever satisfied me yet. How should I be eager to congratulate others on a full meal, when my table is empty and bare? Suppose we have a play here? That will test you a little. It will, besides, be an occupation. You would not mind, little mamma?"

"Mind? Not at all. We had a play once in the picture-gallery, years ago, — the 'Loan of a Lover,' — and I was Gertrude. I wore a short frock and sang 'To-morrow will be market-day,' and danced all about the stage."

"Oh, we will have a play!" said Rodney, who was thoroughly alive. "We will have a pretty stage; it shall be well set, and a manager shall come from New York to put the awkward ones like me through their paces. I will paint the scenes."

"But what shall the play be? That is always the question."

"It hardly need be, with you to be leading lady," said Mrs. Esté.

"Nobody wants a one-part play for private

theatricals. The better the parts, the better the acting generally. It needs an artist to find out the capabilities of a poor *rôle*. Besides, you will want Miss Haxtoun to have some fitting opportunity."

"Oh, yes, Cecil must have a charming part!" said Mrs. Esté.

"I don't know," said Rodney, reluctantly. "I am not so sure Mrs. Haxtoun would wish her to act. I am not certain, in fact, that she could act."

"Act?" said Fanny. "I assure you she will act admirably. She is not in the least an artist; but she has impetuosity, petulance, and is capable of lively impressions and fancies. Should you not like to see her act?"

"On the stage before a crowd? — no."

"I remember hearing once of a French nobleman who was prodigiously in love with his young wife. One night she came down dressed for a ball, and he surveyed her with admiration, but then began pulling her gown to pieces. She was so ravishing in that ball-dress he declared no other man should look at her."

Rodney apparently paid no attention, and at his successful air of indifference Mrs. Esté nodded with feminine sagacity to Fanny, who returned her look. A few weeks before Rodney had been willing enough to talk about Cecil, admiring, criticising, discussing, with an absence of sentiment disheartening to his mother, who wanted him to fall in love.

"What play shall we have?" he now asked, rather impatiently.

"We might consult Frank Medhurst," said Fanny. "He has surprised me by writing a novel, — perhaps he has written a play."

"What novel?"

"It lies over there, on the bench."

Rodney reached out and took the little red volume.

"'Bettering Opportunity,'" he read aloud. "What a name!"

"The novel is not so bad."

"I don't like American novels myself. I know they are the fashion, and that they are remarkably clever; but their realism is so meagre and crude! They are always giving provincial people's first impressions of things, like the ecstasies of a man whose diet has hitherto been hasty-pudding, but is all at once initiated into the refinements of the comfortable dinner well-to-do people have been eating for centuries. The writers take the tone of men of the world, but all the time they are *naïve* as school-boys. They are afraid of strong emotions, and accept mere symbols in place of the realities of life. But I shall read this. Medhurst interests me. I have not yet taken his measure, but now I have him at my mercy. 'Oh that mine adversary had written a book!' What is this about?"

"The hero is a young man who is sent from a Puritan home to make his living in New York. The city first fascinates him with its splendors and its mysteries; then, when he begins to know the life better, and finds out its wickedness, its cynical views, its low aims, he is filled with horror and disgust. It is only because he has positively no opening anywhere else that he can be induced to remain. But all the while his knowledge of the business he has entered has been growing, and with his increasing powers he

finds a powerful attraction in its methods and subtleties. He attracts the attention of the leading manager of the firm, — a brilliant, unscrupulous financier, — who further initiates him into the necessary processes for making money. His first moral aversion is overcome, and presently he finds himself in the vortex he began by loathing. His will never quite consents, but" —

"Then comes the guardian angel of his life. Just as he is lost he is saved. Love, explanations, affecting situations, separation, reunion, marriage, — I see," said Rodney. "I will begin after the virtuous young man has fallen. The regeneration of a sinner is such a warning example."

"I wonder if the book will bring Frank any money," said Fanny.

"I suppose it will depend entirely upon whether people buy it or not. Did you buy this?"

"Indeed, I did not. Who ever buys a book written by an acquaintance? One expects to get hold of it in some cheaper way."

"Of course," said Mrs. Esté. "Mr. Medhurst has been entertained here; he ought to send me a copy."

Rodney burst into the loud laughter habitual when he heard anything which seemed to him particularly characteristic.

"It is the most fortunate thing for the world in general," said he, "that genius is a refractory and imperious power, and urges men on to wreak their force and spend their inspiration upon what will barely give them a living. Nothing but genius has saved the world so far, and nothing but genius

will continue to save the world, from its baseness, hypocrisy, and affectations. I don't suppose Medhurst has genius; nobody seems to have it any longer. Once men wrote, painted, acted, with the passions which possessed them; nowadays they write, paint, and act with the phantasmal likeness of the passions they have heard of. But I suppose some irresistible impulse urged him to write his experience out in this way."

"You may be sure he wanted a little money by it, Rodney," said Mrs. Esté. "Everybody does everything for money nowadays."

"No, they don't. Women marry for money, I know, and men accept the grossest materialism as the rule of their lives. But good, honest, fair work is never done for money, and for money alone. Don't you suppose Medhurst might have done something more lucrative than write books to amuse you?"

"Why did he not do it then?" asked Fanny; "he hates his own poverty badly enough."

"He will do something yet to make money. Don't be afraid of being poor, Fanny," said Mrs. Esté. "If poor August was alive he would give him a place, for your sake."

Fanny shrugged her shoulders and laughed, but had the grace to blush crimson, nevertheless.

"Let us talk about the play," she said, putting aside the question of Medhurst's ambitions, achievements, and failures. She did not feel annoyed at Mrs. Esté's perpetual allusions to him; on the contrary, she found them useful. It was very convenient to have the old lady's insight directed

towards the intricacies of a love-affair that existed only in imagination. Her intercourse with Rodney Heriot was infused this year with a new element, which seemed altogether propitious. He was less brilliant than formerly, but he was more sympathetic. Just at present she found his eyes resting on her.

"I wrote a play once, which went off with some success at Mrs. O'Hara's," he remarked. "The part which Mrs. O'Hara took would suit you very well."

"What have you not done? The idea of your writing a play!"

"I hardly think it will dazzle you; but we might look at it, and see if it would do."

Rodney went to his room and rummaged for an hour, and returned with a voluminous manuscript. Fanny had had time in his absence to reflect that it might prove awkward if she were to dislike the play. She had never received the happiest impression of amateur work. But, after some reflection, she determined to like this immensely, to be delighted with it, to make it, if it lay in her power, a great success.

CHAPTER XIII.

"A WOMAN'S REASON."

CECIL hardly knew herself in these times. There were hours in the day when the mere sense of living seemed to bring with it a feeling of intoxication; when she felt inspired by a happiness that answered all her needs, and solved all her problems; but more often she suffered from restlessness, from a disenchantment, from a conviction of the worthlessness of things. She was torn by conflicting impulses, all of which were restrained by a galling self-consciousness. It was the first time she had had this painful admixture of feeling, and it chained and imprisoned her. It seemed impossible to do anything brightly and spontaneously. It was no longer easy to throw her arms about her father's neck, and press her blooming young cheek against his withered one, kissing and fondling him until he plaintively begged her to desist. As to her mother, she feared her eyes, and found something to rebel against in the very sound of her voice. She was proud and reserved with her cousin for the first time in her life, and Alec seemed to her self-centred and trivial. Alec was in the habit, too, of talking about Mrs. Dalton, and could expand endlessly on the theme of her perfections, all of which were already engraven on Cecil's heart

and brain. Some influence made her at once too tender and too hard. She felt stiff, reluctant, and rebellious against all the surroundings of her life; yet, at the same time, she was conscious of a softness, a tenderness, she had never known before. This is a story as old as nature; for nature acts invariably in this way on a girl's heart, — awakening in her a longing, unfelt hitherto, for love; yet forbidding that the intimate and the usual shall satisfy the longing.

Mrs. Haxtoun had not liked Cecil's looks, nor the abrupt alternations of gayety and despondency in her manner, and the day after the Fourth of July carried her away for a half-week, but brought her back at the end of that time with a feeling that, if Cecil was to fall ill, it would be better for her to be at home. It had all been unspeakably dreary, although Mrs. Haxtoun had spent more money than she liked to remember. They had been to the seaside; but the tumult and the glare had been frightful. The hotel had been filled with people, from whom Mrs. Haxtoun averted her eyes, and against whose voices she longed to close her ears. Even the majestic, infinite expanses of the sea had seemed hopelessly vulgarized by the foreground of dreadful groups on the beach. Cecil had looked at nothing, cared for nothing, and had neither eaten nor slept. Then they left the shore and spent a day at a grand country-house, full of guests; and Cecil, instead of being, as usual, a little queen of the revels, had hidden herself in corners, and declined to dance, and, altogether, behaved in a way to half-break her mother's heart. All this would have been very well, and her heart

might well have been in the highlands a-hunting the deer, except that the highlands were at present too populous. Mrs. Haxtoun came back to Rosendale bold and aggressive. She was fully determined now that Medhurst should go away; and, without losing any more time, intended to rouse Mr. Haxtoun to a full sense of the position.

Cecil brightened a little in coming home. She had had a vivid consciousness all the time she was away that much must be going on, and her mind had been busy concerning the events in progress in her absence. Once in her usual place, however, everything seemed stagnant and lifeless. Lilly had nothing to tell her except of Arthur's comings and goings, and that Alec spent all his evenings with Mrs. Dalton. Concerning Medhurst Lilly was too discreet to utter a syllable. Cecil saw him at table, when he shook hands with her mother, bowed to her, and expressed some satisfaction that they were at home again; but after that he did not even glance in her direction.

But Alec had plenty to tell his sister. Alec was the least impressive of talkers when he was discussing general topics; but he would talk about himself with a *naïve* candor, and with an occasional felicity of description, that was a capital method of communicating what he considered trivial and side issues. Now, for instance, he confided to Cecil, how, early one morning, he had chanced to be looking out of a window, when he saw Mrs. Dalton — absolutely the beautiful Mrs. Dalton — standing at the wicket at the end of the garden. On such a challenge as this what should he naturally have

done except to jump hastily into his clothes, with the intention of joining her? But, alas! just as, after enduring a thousand petty obstructions in the way of refractory buttons and braces, he had surmounted all difficulties, and was slipping in his scarf-pin, he took one peep out the window to make sure of his prize, and what should blast his sight but a glimpse of a straw hat just vaulting over the fence; and in another moment Medhurst and the beautiful widow turned into Mrs. Esté's woods and vanished.

"That was the longest day I ever passed," Alec pursued, in a tone of deep indignation. "I did not feel like going to bed again, being so thoroughly awake, so I went down on the piazza, and waited for the fellow to come back. I give you my word he did not get in till half-past seven; he was away with her two full hours; but I heard her say afterwards that she detested early morning walks, early morning doings of any kind, — so that sounds as if he did not make himself especially agreeable to her."

"Oh, you cannot tell!" cried Cecil, with a little tremor in her voice. "She will say anything for effect. She has little suggestions, and phrases, and compliments which she dispenses around just as we do pictures and *bric-à-brac*, to make something out of nothing, to fill empty spaces, and give an air of attractiveness to our rooms. She says the same thing over and over; she flatters everybody to their faces, — you have heard her talk to papa" —

"I like a woman to make herself pleasant," said Alec. "You see, Cecil, you don't know the world, and you can't half appreciate a woman like that.

She knows how to set a man free, as it were, from his inexperience and awkwardness. Why, when I talk, by Jove! she listens to me as if I were a—a Socrates; and she not only listens, but she leads me on. I can say more, I can think more, with her in ten minutes than I ever did in a day with anybody else. She"—

"She is a coquette!" cried Cecil, peevishly. "She is a wicked, dangerous coquette!"

"She is not a coquette at all. I never saw a woman with so little coquetry. She is practical and sensible; she likes real, actual things, and if, now and then, she indulges in nonsense and badinage, it is just by way of relief from heavier subjects."

"She is deep and designing," murmured Cecil.

"I am sure I don't see why you should dislike her," said Alec, in a tone of excessive injury. "Heriot is not making love to her. With all his advantages he keeps the coolest tone, and seems perfectly willing I should be there all the time."

"I do not dislike her in the least," Cecil explained, with some dignity; "but I confess I do not like her. She may charm men, but women know each other better," declared the young cynic. "As for Mr. Heriot, I think him quite a match for her in every way. They have lived in the same world, they have the same manners and the same tone, and have mastered the same arts."

"Oh, you're jealous of her, Cecil. I see!"

"Jealous! Nothing of the sort."

"You will not confess that she is beautiful."

"She is the most beautiful woman I ever saw in my life."

"That is something like it. What could surpass that red-gold hair; those dark eyes?"

"Alec, you are infatuated!"

"The exquisite, clear-cut features; the carnation of the lips on that beautiful, pale, cold face."

"Alec, you composed that with a pencil and paper in your hand, or else you got it out of some foolish book."

"What do you suppose she says of me?"

"That you are a nonsensical boy."

"Indeed, she has never given me the faintest intimation that she considers me young. She says I am a born actor."

"A born actor!" repeated Cecil, in a tone of incredulity.

"You know there is to be a play."

"A play?"

"A play. *Mrs. Dalton is to act!*"

"She acts everywhere,—in the parlor, out-of-doors; wherever she is she plays a part, and it is quite conceivable that she should take naturally to the stage. But what about the play? Is it to be at Mrs. Esté's?"

"Yes; the picture-gallery is to be turned into a theatre."

"It all seems to have been decided on very hastily. I heard nothing of it before I went away."

"They sent over for Medhurst, night before last, to discuss the subject."

"Oh!" said Cecil, in quite a different voice. "So Mr. Medhurst is to be in it?"

"He says not. He declares he has no time. He

was asked to name some suitable play; and they sent to New York for a long list of comedies, vaudevilles, and farces which he made out, but have finally decided on a play of Heriot's."

"I should never," declared Cecil, with a strange accent, "have supposed that Mr. Medhurst would care about such social follies and vanities as private theatricals."

"He seemed to be chief adviser. He is a regular literary fellow. It seems he has written a novel."

"A novel!" Cecil repeated, her color changing. "What novel?"

"I have forgotten the name. They are reading it over there," said Alec, indicating Mrs. Esté's house. "They discuss it a good deal; in fact, I confess, I have grown tired of the subject. Well, to-night I am going over to read Heriot's play; Medhurst is going too, and there will be some final decision as to the performance."

"Am I to be asked to act?" asked Cecil, in a manner which left it undecided whether she would treat any such invitation with cordiality or contempt.

"I don't know," returned Alec. "I dare say. Nobody has mentioned your name; but then"—

"Do not say that I asked; do not let anybody fancy that I was curious on the subject," cried Cecil.

Alec promised he would not allude to her, in the tone of one for whom such reserve did not involve any self-denial. In fact, Cecil said to herself, she was quite unimportant. Nobody had consulted her; nobody had waited for her. The "art of keeping

things going, and herself on top of them," belonged to Mrs. Dalton, and to Mrs. Dalton alone. She herself was far away from the vortex, and would not allow herself to be drawn in by the mere force of the eddy.

But Cecil had new thoughts, and was inspired by fresh force. It was a thing, first, to ponder over, that Medhurst had written a book; and, in the second place, she must have that book. Still, she was at a loss to know how to find herself in possession of it. She did not even know the name. She remembered that the daily papers had literary notices and publishers' advertisements, which had hitherto been matter to her of no concern. Now she undertook to look through the "Ledger," "Tribune," and "Transcript" for the last month. This was, in itself, an enterprise requiring effort, patience, and secrecy. So far all the undertakings in Cecil's short life had been the theme of her tongue, — she had demanded sympathy, approbation, and applause at every step. Now she studied in every way to avoid observation. The papers were in the library, and the library at this time of the year was used chiefly as a thoroughfare to the side-piazza, where some one was generally sitting. Accordingly, to lay hands upon and carry off, unseen and unsuspected, some fivescore of papers, required dexterity and wit. But difficulties and dangers like these could be overcome. The real task lay in finding time and opportunity to search these papers through. One never could be sure where the item might be. Accordingly, lest it might lurk in some secret corner, Cecil was compelled to go through the sheet column

by column. This might have been done if she could have ensured herself safe seclusion in her own room. But Lilly's little apartment opened out of hers, and it had been the habit of their girlhood to merge the two sleeping-chambers into one. The door was never closed, although the chintz *portière* might be stretched across it. Lilly had never in her life put on a dress without a few moments of hesitation as to which of them she should choose. Every little frippery of lace, ruff, or ribbon had to be talked over, compared, held up in different lights. It was not, perhaps, that Lilly wanted advice, but that she liked to give each event of her little life its full importance; and she knew better, perhaps, the value of her own opinions after hearing the impersonal views of others. Cecil, on her side, had always had plenty of reasons for looking in upon her cousin at every turn of her toilet. Cecil's mind was not so many-sided in the matter of dress; but it was while she was brushing her hair, or adjusting her tuckers, that vivid, brilliant, and startling ideas assailed her, and she would rush to the door with "O Lilly dear, I have the most delightful plan!" In fact, the idea of any special privacy in her own room had never occurred to either of the young girls; and now that Cecil had this herculean task of looking up an advertisement, it may easily be seen that she had to evade a pair of bright young eyes, full of curiosity, suspicion, maliciousness. Lilly soon discovered that something was going on; but, on account of the little coolness growing up between her and Cecil, she determined to use her observation, instead of her tongue, in finding out what this

sudden absorption in newspapers meant. Three times in a single day she surprised her cousin behind a great printed sheet, her eyes roaming, intent, eager, dilated, her lips apart. And when she looked up, and met Lilly's eyes, there was an unmistakable indication of being detected in something secret, almost illicit; and she wore such an unmistakable air of excitement that Lilly exhausted herself in conjecture as to what it all meant. She felt as if she had had a key put into her hand, but had no idea into what secret chambers it led. If Cecil found anything to fascinate, absorb, and kindle emotion, in those stupid papers, Lilly felt that she could do the same, and gain equal entertainment of a high order. Lilly could hardly wait for her turn to come, and felt it a lucky chance when Mrs. Haxtoun, at dinner, remarked that she and her daughter were on the point of sallying forth to pay visits until tea-time.

No sooner was the carriage out of sight than Lilly flew up the staircase. Her impulse had always been to help herself to the good things which people were too disobliging to offer her. Here were the piles of papers hidden behind the chintz curtains, and here was Lilly, with wide-open eyes, ready to devour whatever they contained. For a quarter of an hour she felt on the verge of some exciting discovery; then the occupation began to grow monotonous. It was very vexatious that she had not the key, after all. She only saw a closed door before her, while she grew every moment more and more conscious she had no key whatever to fit. Lilly began to grow angry. The thought suggested itself that Cecil had been playing her a trick; that she had gone

elaborately to work to rouse her curiosity, and then put obstacles in the way of her satisfying it. At this moment, when Lilly was on the verge of an ebullition of wrath, Cecil came in; that is, she opened the door, and, seeing Lilly in the window-seat, stopped short, turned, first, red, then pale, and put on a delicately disdainful air.

"I thought," faltered Lilly, "you had gone to pay visits."

"We met Cousin Rebecca coming here, so we turned back," returned Cecil, calmly. "I am very sorry to interrupt you, Lilly. Pray go on," she added, with ironic politeness.

"Seeing the papers here that you were reading," Lilly returned, "I thought I would sit down and look them over."

"Very dull reading I found them," said Cecil.

"I never in my life saw you so excited over anything as over those papers," declared Lilly, who felt snubbed and extinguished by Cecil's grand air. "I wanted to see what it was. I hate mystifications; I hate concealments; I like everything open, fair, and above board."

"I see you do," Cecil replied, still with something exquisite in her dignity. "As to the papers," she went on, "pray carry them into your own room, and look them over at your leisure. I meant to have rung for Martha to take them away."

This was the truth, for Cecil had found nothing about Medhurst's book in the papers. She might have been inclined to enjoy the present moment, when, without pressing the point with obtrusive candor, she had still proved, with perfect clearness,

to Lilly that she had been making a goose of herself. But Cecil was preoccupied, and knew, too, who had been the first goose. If she once knew the name of the book it would be a simple matter to procure it. A note to the bookseller's, on Market street, and up it would come by book-post, and she would be on the watch for it. One unused expedient remained, and she now made up her mind to avail herself of it next day, first making sure that she was in no danger of being caught in the act. She had already searched the study, and there was no sign of a novel there, and her thoughts now turned to Medhurst's sleeping apartment. She set out to go tip-toe through this room, with the hope of finding the book lying on the table or the shelf. She knew that her mother and Lilly were both showing the farthest-off flower-beds to some visitors; she could see the group from the window. Medhurst himself was in the study, and Mr. Haxtoun was walking up and down the terrace with a guest. The servants never came into this part of the house at this time of the day unless the bell rang for them. In spite of these precautions Cecil turned the door of Medhurst's room with a beating heart and a pale face; then, once inside, at the motion of the lace curtains waving to and fro in the afternoon breeze, a bewilderment seized her. She stopped short, turned, and was about to flee. Voices seemed calling to her; warning apparitions floated to and fro. She knew it was only the wind in the trees, and the river reflections on the ceiling, but something disturbed her to the bottom of her soul. She felt that if she could open the blinds, and admit air and light, she might throw

off this stifling sensation which impeded her. She did so; but at the moment a ray of sunlight, making its way through the group of beeches, struck upon her forehead like a tongue of flame, and seemed to burn her. She fled on the moment, trembling from head to foot. It took her half an hour to regain her equilibrium. All was in confusion within her.

Meanwhile Medhurst finished his afternoon's work, and, what was unusual with him, found an errand to his room. He had never felt that the pretty, boudoir-like apartment really belonged to him, and he kept his own implements and appointments well out of sight, in order not to spoil the pretty and coquettish effect. Hence any kind of disorder attracted his eye, and, at the sight of something lying on the floor, he at once picked it up. It was nothing of his own; something, on the contrary, soft, filmy, the edges set off by delicate embroidery. It was, in fact, a handkerchief, with Cecil's name worked in the corner. Medhurst held it for a few moments, regarding it intently. Certain pictures of Cecil, possibly in this very room, appeared vividly in succession before his mental vision, and twice in his reverie he applied the soft linen to his cheek. Emerging from this dreamy condition he went downstairs, still holding the handkerchief in his hand, and, going out on the porch, looked up the broad walk, which led straight to the garden. Half-a-dozen ladies were walking there, near the summer-house, where he thought it probable tea was being served. He went down the steps, and sauntered towards the group, with no especial purpose in his mind.

He was looking for Cecil, and only Cecil; and the light parasols and dresses of the other ladies were merely accessories of the scene, like the flowers and shrubs. All at once, however, he received a sharp rap across his shoulders, and, turning, saw Mrs. Esté, who had jumped up, in her pretty, infantile way, from a bench, and now assailed him.

"I was wishing to see you. I was talking about you," she cried, with vivacity. "I was telling Miss Haxtoun about your book, which she says she has not seen. Sit down, and explain why you keep such talents in the dark. Such strength, such depth, such tenderness! And the love scenes, — they wrung my heart! They are just like life. Ah, youth, youth, how can you know such things?"

Mrs. Esté was brandishing a point-lace parasol, with an ivory handle, which struck feebly and indefinitely wherever it chanced to alight; and Medhurst was stabbed, by turns, in the breast, in the neck, and in the eye, by this delicate weapon.

"Shall I furl it for you?" he inquired. "You are quite in the shade here."

"Oh, it is my weapon, my shield, my helmet," said Mrs. Esté, with her little shrug of the shoulders. "I don't want to be looked at too curiously. You might find out how many wrinkles I have got, you clever, observant cynic!" and she thrust it in his face again.

In spite of this candor Mrs. Esté's appearance was as youthful as it was brilliant. She wore a white veil, and behind it her complexion appeared absolutely dazzling. She was dressed in a long,

trailing reception-dress, of pale azure; and a small bonnet, with the same exquisite shade repeated in its plumes, surmounted her soft, snowy curls.

Her ruffled sleeves reached only to her elbow, and her little arms were covered with loosely fitting gloves. Cecil had brought her a cup of tea, but she declined it. She was perhaps not prepared to raise the silvery film of a veil which made her so radiant.

Medhurst looked at her with a sort of bewildered admiration.

"Miss Haxtoun says you have never said a word to her about your book; how is that?" demanded Mrs. Esté. "Is it a secret? If it were a secret why did you not tell it to me, instead of to Fanny Dalton? I can keep a secret. I have sympathy, sentiment, silence. I am never grand; but then I am never petty! I am faithful — I am" —

"I am too unimportant a person to have it matter whether my name is known as the author of the book," said Medhurst. "It belongs to an anonymous series, so I never discussed the matter with the publishers."

"Oh!" exclaimed Cecil; "so your name is not given!"

He was struck by the vibration of her voice. Looking at her he saw that it accorded with the excited expression of her face, and the brilliancy of her eyes, which were fixed and opened wide.

"No," said he, quietly.

"The name of the book is 'Bettering Opportu-

nity,' I hear," she went on, with some significance in her tone.

"Don't read it," he exclaimed. "I beg you not to read it, Miss Haxtoun. It is actually of no importance."

"That is what one likes in you," struck in Mrs. Esté, with a little shriek, and now piercing his temple with the sharp point of the parasol-tip. "You are so quiet, so modest, so reserved, one does not know what is in you. I should not be surprised to hear that you were a prince in disguise, should you, Cecil, dearest?"

"Nothing in the way of silence, disguise, and successful mystification would astonish me where Mr. Medhurst is concerned," said Cecil, in a low tone, which Mrs. Esté did not quite catch.

"And in the theatricals," Mrs. Esté pursued, "we want him to take a part suited to his good looks and his talents; but there this modesty and self-restraint come in again. He refuses to do anything except by way of filling a gap. If one yawns wide enough to threaten to destroy the chances of the play, he is willing to throw himself into the gulf, like Marcus Curtius."

"That is noble," said Cecil, in an ironic tone.

"We have come over to ask Miss Haxtoun to take the part of Nathalie," said Mrs. Esté. "Mrs. Haxtoun has given her consent, and also that Miss Winchester shall join us; but here is this little girl quite refractory and rebellious, and flatly refuses to act."

"Indeed? That seems a pity," said Medhurst.

"Miss Haxtoun would show no meagre abilities in that line, I fancy."

"You have read the play, I believe. What part do you think I ought to take?" Cecil asked, with a little, disdainful smile.

"Dear Lady Disdain," said Medhurst, still holding Cecil's handkerchief in his hand, now crumpled into the smallest wad.

Engaged in this little war, neither Cecil nor Medhurst had noticed that Mrs. Dalton stood close behind them, on the turf, having crossed from the summer-house, with her soft, floating movement. She was looking from one to the other, and seemed excessively amused. A brilliant spot of color burned on each of Cecil's cheeks, and they were repeated in Medhurst's. There were in the air of each unmistakable signs of their having recently passed some flood-tide of excitement; but what their faces showed their words hardly accounted for.

"Are you talking about our poor little play?" Mrs. Dalton now asked, in a pretty, caressing way. "I dare say, Miss Haxtoun, if you felt any timidity about undertaking a part, that my Cousin Frank would train you a little for it."

"You are ever so kind," said Cecil; "but I should not like to have to wait until Mr. Medhurst had time to teach me."

"He would like nothing better," pursued Mrs. Dalton. "He has drilled me many a time."

"Now he can drill you over again," said Cecil, with a little, joyous laugh.

"Now I am too old. To be young, and to be

blundering and ignorant, that may be borne. But, Miss Haxtoun, you will play, will you not?"

"I have told Mrs. Esté I cannot undertake it."

"Perhaps Mrs. Esté's son may shake your resolution."

"Mr. Heriot can be very eloquent," put in Medhurst.

"Well, perhaps, if he is very eloquent," said Cecil.

"But what is your objection?" asked Mrs. Dalton. "Everybody loves to play, now. Nine women out of ten long to go on the stage. Did you never have the inclination?"

Cecil shrugged her shoulders slightly, and smiled.

"One gets so tired of one's little scrap of existence," pursued Mrs. Dalton. "By the time one is twenty-five it is all mapped out, and one can survey one's own mental estate and consider how dull it is. In real life you only have one chance. You may, perhaps, be a Juliet, — and it is very pretty and pathetic to be a Juliet, — but it comes to an end very soon. On the stage there are no limitations: one is a Juliet, but one is also a Cleopatra; a Marguerite, but also a Rosalind. Should you not like that, Miss Haxtoun?"

"I am afraid I have not sufficient imagination," Cecil replied, with an air of candor. "Besides, it seems to me my vitality is more complete when I am just myself, than it would be if I tried to be a little scrap of this, and again a little scrap of that. There is not enough of me to go round. I should be dreadfully piecemeal."

Mrs. Esté's parasol had been quiet for a few moments. She had, in fact, indulged in one of the little naps she could not resist when she had not the full weight of the conversation upon her. But she now reëmerged with extreme vivacity, and gave Medhurst one of her playful taps, asked Fanny if she were ready to take leave, and demanded to be taken to her carriage.

CHAPTER XIV.

TWO LOVERS.

IT had been Mrs. Haxtoun's reception-day, and the last afternoon guest did not take her departure until it was almost dark. Ever since dinner Cecil and Lilly had been making coffee and tea, and sending cups about, out-of-doors and in. Cecil's little excursion into a forbidden land, which we dwelt on in the last chapter, had not taken many minutes, and had been unnoticeably niched between the speeding of certain guests away and the welcoming of new ones. By eight o'clock she was very tired; but she knew that the lull was merely temporary; and that shortly the evening visitors would appear.

"I am going to walk in the garden a little, by myself," she said to her mother.

"Do you not want Lilly to go with you?"

"Lilly and Arthur? No, thank you. I would rather be quite by myself; it will freshen me a little."

She ran out at once into the warm, scented dusk. A faint wind had risen, which made the tree-tops wave, but did not descend except occasionally in sweet, deep breaths of cooler air, for which one waited as for a reviving cordial. Far up in the

north-west a vermilion flush of sunset lingered still, and away in the east the sky was taking a glow which heralded the moon. The silence was intense; the river showed by glimpses faintly cold and gray. The flowers had all turned white, and a rose-bush, laden with straw-colored blossoms, looked like a Christmas-tree hung with pale lamps. Cecil stood still and looked up; not a star was out. Yes, there was Arcturus; and the Dipper suddenly gleamed faintly. All at once a thrush, belated, or in its first happy dream, gave forth its last burr. She started as if frightened, then, gathering up her skirts in her hand, ran lightly down the broad, gravelled walk.

Near the summer-house she paused. It had grown darker since she came out. The east was brighter, but the moon was not yet up. Still every object rose half-dim, yet distinctly, in the shadowless twilight. It seemed to her some one was sitting in the arbor, and she hardly liked to advance. A moment ended any uncertainty, for at her first sign of hesitation Medhurst came towards her. She gave a cry of surprise.

"Pray, do not be frightened," said he. "I have been sitting here since the afternoon."

"All alone?"

"Quite alone. I do not know who would keep me company."

"I came out to feel the coolness," said Cecil. "I was very warm and very tired."

"Your coming gives me a chance to restore this little article of yours," said Medhurst, whose manner was unnecessarily haughty. He held out the handkerchief.

"What is it?" she asked, doubtfully.

"A handkerchief!"

"Oh, thank you so much."

"Having accomplished that duty, I will take myself off," said Medhurst. "You can continue your stroll undisturbed."

He was about to move past her, but she stretched out her hand. "Stay a moment," she exclaimed, with an imperative gesture. "I have sent for your book."

"That was unnecessary. Had I supposed you would care to read it I would have offered it to you. I kept two copies; one I gave to Mrs. Dalton."

"I preferred to buy it," said Cecil. "I have sent a postal card to papa's place in town, and it will be up to-morrow."

"I should like to have given it to you. I should have done so, had I not felt that it might be considered a piece of presumption on my part."

"Do not speak in that way," said Cecil, with a tremor of something like indignation in her voice.

"God knows," continued Medhurst, with some heat, "I want to keep my place here with what show of propriety, humility, and decency I can; but where you are concerned I seem constantly in some way to overstep the appointed boundaries."

"I do not know to what you allude."

"Do you not? I should not know how to make it clear to you. One night you were on the river in the boat with me, and what could have been more genial and friendly than your manner?—you showed sympathy. A few days later you made it exceedingly plain that I was not to remember those two

pleasant hours, or, at least, to count on them as an assurance of any permanent kindness from you."

"Do you mean the Fourth of July?" asked Cecil, in a low voice.

"Yes, I mean the Fourth of July."

"I should have said that instead of"— Cecil began with intense earnestness, but then broke off, and remained obstinately silent. He waited, but she made no further effort to conclude.

"Do not fancy that I mean to complain," he said, proudly. "I wished merely to prove to you that my intention is to take the place you accord to me in the house. The position I hold is anomalous, and I have not sufficient tact or knowledge of social rules to define what its duties are. I would not for the world presume; but, at the same time, I hate to fail in any obligation. I am sorry I did not at once present my stupid little novel to Mrs. Haxtoun."

He had said all this in a tone of intense annoyance and mortification, but with a sort of restraint, as if every syllable of explanation cost him dear. In fact he had been furious in the afternoon, and still remained furious. He could see her young face shining in the first beams of the rising moon. The white light changed its usual rosy, almost childish, oval into a new beauty and a new expression. She looked to him like a goddess.

"You see," she said, in a hopeless tone, "you do not know me. It is impossible for me to — to be always the same. Besides, I am pulled first one way, and then the other; it is not always all my own fault. It is"—

"Pray do not make these confessions. You are certain to regret them. You need tell me but one thing, — of what were you accusing me, when you declared to-day that nothing in the way of silence, disguise, and successful mystification would surprise you where I was concerned?"

"Did I say that?"

"Precisely that. You said it, too, with a directness and vehemence which showed it to be the overflow of some long, bitter, and suspicious thoughts in your mind."

"I ought not to have said it." She spoke almost under her breath.

"Certainly, if you felt it you were right in saying it. My only question is, what meaning was in your mind?"

"You had told me the story of your life, you know," faltered Cecil.

"Well, yes."

She had drawn nearer to him. He could see her face plainly; childish, supplicating, and intensely serious.

"Then," she went on, brokenly, "when I saw you meet Mrs. Dalton, I said to myself, 'He told me nothing, after all.' I could no longer feel that you had been open and candid with me. I believed you had withheld what was actually of interest and importance."

Medhurst was frankly amazed. He seemed to feel his head swimming with a multitude of impressions. He might have been amused, except that her absolute *naïveté*, and her obedience in answering his demand, touched him. "But," said he, singu-

larly embarrassed, — "but how can a man speak of such things, and to a young girl? I had nothing to tell that sounded heroic or successful, and it would have seemed a pity to add a commonplace story of slighted love, like mine."

"A commonplace story?"

"We were engaged for a time," said Medhurst, in a dull voice, "and then she married Dalton."

"How terrible! How cruel!" cried Cecil.

Medhurst was silent.

"The night you were in the boat, and I was talking about myself," said he, after a short pause, "I was not thinking of her at all. I had no idea what had become of her. Presently you told me she was in this neighborhood. Even then I supposed she was still married."

"You did not know when you met her that day that she was a widow?"

"No. She told me herself."

They were both silent. Medhurst stood, with his arms folded, looking down at the young girl. He did not care to analyze the feelings stirring within him. She seemed timid, but there were still signs of her being excited and absorbed.

"I had heard that you were once engaged to her," Cecil now said, looking up at him.

"Who told you?"

"Mr. Heriot."

"It is hardly worth talking about. What is past is past."

"Perhaps I ought to tell you," began Cecil, but paused.

"Tell me what?"

"That one reason I have longed to read your book is, that" —

She hesitated, and he finished the speech for her.

"You think I have written down my love-story? You don't know me. Peeping and botanizing upon my mother's grave? No. I have just given my parable against this dishonest, materialistic, accursed age. That is all."

The stillness grew appalling. The glow of sunset was quite gone from the west, and on that side the trees gloomed together in great masses; but against the east they showed the interlacing of their branches, and the net-work of their leaves, as the full moon floated up, each moment opening new vistas and casting fresh shadows. The house stood at the end of the long walk, with its long, gleaming, lace-curtained windows lighting up its dark height.

"Ought you not to go in?" Medhurst asked, suddenly.

"Perhaps so," she said, timidly; then she put out her hand. "Tell me you are no longer angry with me," she murmured.

He could not have helped taking the hand without repulsing her, and, taking it, he grasped it impetuously, then dropped it on the moment. A sound suddenly pierced the silence; footsteps were heard.

"Walk toward the house quietly," Medhurst said, in her ear. "That is Heriot. Don't let him know I was here."

Cecil obeyed mechanically. She was a little bewildered, but she was not confused. She neither

saw Medhurst nor heard him, as he leaped across the wide flower-beds which bordered the path, and vanished behind the shrubbery. She had time for about twenty steps before she became actually certain that some one was approaching. Then a figure began to take shape out of the gloom, and presently Rodney Heriot had joined her.

"Your mother sent me out to take care of you," he said, coming close to her and pausing. "She said I might walk with you here a little."

"I was just going in."

"Do not go in. Stay here with me. Inside it is stifling, and they are talking endlessly about the most uninteresting things. Here it is a foretaste of heaven."

"My ideas of heaven are so different from yours."

"You have so many ideas. You don't seem to know the proper feminine attitude at all."

"What is that?"

"Looking up, and adoring and receiving."

"I should like to look up and adore," said Cecil, with a sort of petulance. "I wish I were a little child, to be governed and led, and kept out of mischief."

"Kept out of mischief!" repeated Rodney, in a tone of incredulity. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know," said Cecil, turning abruptly away, and staring hard at the moon.

"I will keep you out of mischief," said Rodney. "Take my arm, Miss Haxtoun, and let us walk along."

Almost to his surprise, she obeyed.

It was the first time he had ever been actually alone with her, and something soft and compliant in her mood enhanced the worth of his opportunity. A thousand fancies whirled through his mind: he might end his uncertainty by offering her marriage; he might, better still, make some advances, which should give him a sight of that delightful country which he coveted, without making him wholly lose the charm of his free, roving life outside; then, again, it was possible to make her like him a little better. He might talk, not plead; be himself, not act; and she might become stirred, touched, fascinated. If a man could not, under such skies, on such a night as this, say something to the woman he loved, he had better hold his tongue ever after. All he had to do was to feel, and to let himself go. Rodney could be eloquent enough upon occasions, and he wondered where his wit was now. He was dumb.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked presently, finding silence irksome.

"I was not thinking."

"Then I trust you had not committed yourself to the thought that I was stupid."

"I am not apt to think that. I generally consider you too clever for any of us. I might call myself stupid, but I always reflect that it does not matter. If you were bored you would go away. I cannot imagine you a victim to be pitied and have your wrongs redressed."

"You could not pity me, then; and you fancy I have not been bored since I came to stay with my mother?"

"You would have gone away if you had been very

much bored, or if you considered you would be less bored in other places."

"You are right. I had no such inducement to go away as I had to remain."

Cecil said nothing. Rodney himself felt inexplicably happy. It would have contented him to walk up and down till midnight in this bland, fresh air, with her hand on his arm. If he could have put his hand over hers, that would have been delicious; but he delayed even making the attempt, preferring that imagination and illusion should have their hour first. He was faintly troubled by stray fears that she might be finding him tiresome. He had never had to ponder the matter before, how and to what degree he pleased a woman; whether the intellect, the heart, or the spirit; whether deeply, superficially, or not at all. But Cecil was to him inscrutable. Without life and without experience he could not tell what a woman's impressions might be. She might find a man passionately in love a grotesque object. He remembered once being at the *Théâtre Italien* with a party, among whom were two young American girls. It was a "Trovatore" night, and the tenor was superb, and sang *Non ti scordar di me* as it had rarely been given, even in Paris. It quite melted him, and, to hide a certain emotion, he started to go into the lobby, and there chanced to see that the two girls were in fits of laughter. He supposed at first it was hysterical; but it was explained to him, with easy candor, that they found Manrico the most irresistibly funny object as he sang, because he opened his mouth so queerly. The impression he gained at that moment had been a bar to his admira-

tion for young girls for many a day after. It was possible that Cecil had some sarcastic idea in her mind now, which she would either launch at him on occasion, or whisper to her mother or cousin afterwards. He felt that he ought to rouse himself, to talk, to act. But then that endless thrusting and parrying, which women call conversation, was so hard and coarse, compared with this fine pleasure his thoughts gave him. The most delicious images gathered shape, and passed vividly before his mind. There was immense sweetness in feeling that he was almost face to face with a charming fresh and wholly passionate experience just behind the veil which he ought even at this moment to lift.

"Mr. Heriot," said Cecil.

"Well," he answered, almost amazed that an expression of intense tenderness did not instead issue from his lips.

"You say nothing to me about the play."

"The play — the play — the play," he said, with an accent as if wishing to annihilate the play. "Well, what of it?"

"They were asking me to take a part."

"And you declined. I admired you for it."

"Why?" asked Cecil, hesitatingly. "Did you really prefer I should not play?"

"I hate to think of you in connection with the rivalry of actors, the foot-lights, the rouge, all the tawdry paraphernalia of even a mock theatre."

"Yet you were anxious to have Mrs. Dalton act."

"Do you suppose I put you and Mrs. Dalton in the same category? Why, Cecil, if the alternative were between your becoming a woman like Fanny

Dalton or my mother, yet being wholly and entirely mine, and staying as you are, and my parting from you forever, — nevermore to look upon your face, — I would not hesitate for a moment."

"You ought not to speak of your mother in that disrespectful way."

"But then, my first passion was for my mother, and no man can close the account of his first passion and not be a little bitter over it. You can't begin to think how I worshipped her when I was a little fellow. She was so pretty, so delicate; I thought her the finest lady in the world. I used to sit and watch her make her toilet to go out to parties, and her little arts bewitched me. I dare say she has two women to dress her now; but then she did everything herself, even to making her own gowns. She had the brightest blonde hair, and it curled at the merest touch of her little, slender fingers. 'Now, just a tinge of pink,' she would say, and her cheeks would brighten up into the prettiest blush. 'My eyes are dull,' she would go on, and a line of black under the lower lid made them larger and sadder. I did not see the harm of it, and I did see the charm; and I used to flatter her, and she told me nobody else's compliments counted at all. We used to chatter and flirt like a boy and girl, and with her hand on my arm I was as happy *almost* — as I am to-night. When we sat opposite each other at meals we used to talk brilliantly and wittily, I thought. Well, Cecil, one day I went into the parlor and saw her pretty blonde head against a man's shoulder. You have seen Esté, and know what a Hyperion he

was. Henceforth he made a third in our little paradise until I was cast out."

"But now you have got her back again."

"No, — that dream was over. I may easily be deceived once; but, undeceived, my eyes are blinded no more. She was perfectly well satisfied with her ape; his antics did not mortify her. She had all the money she wanted, and could out-dress and outshine the women she had been competing with at a disadvantage before."

"But can you not forgive her, now that she is old?"

"Oh, I forgive her! I hated Esté, but I never hated her. Still, when I say within myself that I am nothing, nobody; have attempted nothing, achieved nothing; lived for the moment only, yet gained nothing of worth from even its pleasures, — then I say it is all her fault. But, after all, I do not believe it, even when I declare it most intensely. And now that I am used to her again I occasionally feel a trick of the old love. She is such a foolish, kittenish, old cat."

He had let himself go and had been carried away; but not by the deep thought which burned in his heart.

"But, Mr. Heriot," said Cecil, "do you think I might withdraw my refusal to act?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And you will not mind having me in the play?"

"No."

"Then, if I may, I will accept."

"Ah, I see; you want to put on a little rouge!"

"Oh, no! Nothing would induce me to wear rouge."

"You can't help yourself. You cannot be two people at once. You cannot say, I will be simple, natural, true, and at the same time be the other thing. Well, don't put on any rouge when you walk in the garden with me."

"We must go in," said Cecil. "The wind is colder; I feel chilly."

"There was something I wanted to say to you" —

"You can tell me inside."

"Are you actually cold?"

"I am shivering all over. Mamma will be quite vexed with me for staying out so long."

"It was so pleasant," said Rodney, "that I put it off too long. I shall not tell you my secret to-night, nor I think will I go in again. You can bid Mrs. Haxtoun good-by for me."

He did not even ascend the steps, but stood on the drive, watching Cecil as her light shape crossed the porch and vanished inside the lighted door.

CHAPTER XV.

A STAR-CHAMBER MATTER.

ON a summer night so many things under the wide skies listen and wait, it would have been strange if the secret of Cecil's meeting with Medhurst had not been blabbed aloud. Lilly Winchester had said to Arthur, after Cecil had run out into the twilight, that she, too, wanted a walk, and the engaged lovers had strolled away, as if to go to the water's edge. Half-way down the terraces Lilly paused.

"Don't say a word, Arthur," she whispered; "I'll explain afterwards, but I want to go up to the garden through the grapery."

Under the trellises, covered with their luxuriant vines, all was dark as night; but Lilly knew the way, and led her bewildered lover swiftly, but stealthily, up the slopes, now and then turning to give some word of warning and to repress any possible exclamation forced from him by his increasing surprise. Arthur never pretended to comprehend Lilly. One of her most irresistible charms to him was th[illegible]she soared above him in wit, resource, and enterprise. Her little tricks and *minauderies* sometimes struck him as suggestive of dangerous mischief going on in her mind; but when she turned her bright little face towards him it would have been quite impossible

for him to suspect envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, behind that pretty mask of rose and white complexion and blue eyes. Besides, if she drew him into a morass, she never left him there to flounder alone, but was certain to extricate him, even at the risk of getting into deeper mire herself. She never expected anything of him except sympathy; so now when she behaved, as at present, with an impulse and vehemence rather uncalled for by the occasion, it was his habit to reflect that she knew very well what she was about. He hated the trouble, but he admired her energy.

As they neared the garden Lilly paused. A broad walk ran to the summer-house from the side-piazza, bordered by wide flower-beds, which, approaching the arbor, emerged into an elaborate arrangement of circles, triangles, and squares, all bedded with summer and autumn annuals and perennials; consequently there was a wide space which the two conspirators could not cross unseen. Lilly had hoped to get behind some of the shrubberies before Cecil's slow saunter had brought her to this place. But not so. Five minutes later, however, Lilly could not sufficiently congratulate herself that she had not left the gloom of the grapery; for, as Cecil strolled down the path, Medhurst, as we have already noted, came out of the summer-house, and the two met, not six yards away from Lilly. She could hear their voices, but not their words; but what were words? It was enough to see what was going on. If there was anything Lilly abhorred it was an underhand action. Frankness, candor, and light, being the elements she lived in, it grieved, it even revolted, her to wit-

ness this clandestine meeting between Cecil and her father's secretary. There could be no doubt that the stolen meeting had been arranged. And since such iniquities were successful she could not sufficiently applaud her own foresight in coming to assure herself exactly how affairs stood.

A trial to her nerves was in store for her, however. While she stood using every glimmer of the lessening light to see what was going on, apparently without signal, preparation, or warning, Medhurst, who the second before had taken Cecil's hand in his, all at once changed his tactics, and, making a mighty jump, cleared the flower-beds at a bound, and strode into the grapery, upsetting Arthur, who was balancing himself meditatively on one foot, and wishing he could light a cigar, by way of passing the time.

"You prying rascal!" muttered Medhurst, "what are you doing here?"

But he waited for no answer, and strode on, leaving Arthur to gather himself and his dignity up together as he best might. And Lilly's lover was so confounded by the unexpected turn of events that he hardly knew how to do either, and sat on the moss gazing at Lilly, with a blind rage at something, he knew hardly what. It might be a mistake, but how was he to ignore a mistake? He expected a full and complete apology from the author of it at once, and said to himself he did not know what would happen if Medhurst did not come instantly and humble himself before him. Besides humility from Medhurst he had a right to expect full and complete sympathy from Lilly; but that young lady

was too much engrossed by the developments of the situation to waste feeling upon him at that moment.

"Hush!" she whispered imperiously at his exclamation; "Hush!" and enforced the command with a frowning brow and a raised forefinger. Everything has its limits, and Arthur felt the floods of bitterness surge over his soul. It was bad enough to be led about by Lilly like a dog, but he certainly had no intention of letting other people treat him like a dog.

To do Lilly justice, she felt for her lover thus ignominiously upset by Medhurst in his hasty retreat; but then she saw that he had been taken for the gardener's boy, or some understrapper about the place, and she found relief in this erroneous notion. When she and Arthur were on their way back to the house she tried to make it clear to him that he must forgive the accident, and cherish no bitter or vindictive feelings in consequence. And at Arthur's indignant declaration, that he was going to knock Medhurst down the next time he saw him, she interposed all sorts of warnings, threats, and entreaties.

"He must never know who it was; it would look very queer if we were discovered to have been listening there."

"It would look very queer if I allowed myself to be knocked down by a secretary fellow, a mere"—

"But, don't you see, Arthur, that we could not explain."

"I don't want to explain, — I want him to explain," persisted Arthur, in whose brain, for once, a clear idea was working with a sure leaven.

Lilly was in the habit of fitting her lover out with the ideas he was to express, like a child who dresses her doll with the clothes she chooses her to wear. She generally told him how any fresh circumstance was to strike him, and had a wonderful knack of supplying his mental deficiencies out of the storehouse of her quick fancy. Now, however, he had gained a vivid and a personal idea, and she could not dispossess him of it; and for once she was compelled to feel her lack of power, and to realize that if, at exactly the right moment, she had offered some gentle and affectionate commiseration for his scraped knee and bruised shin she might have lost none of her usual advantages.

She hastened with her story, however, to her aunt, and put an end to all the hopes that had been agitating that good lady's bosom at the thought that Cecil was walking in the garden with Rodney Heriot, by moonlight, and gave her, instead, a night of excruciating disappointment. Certainly, nothing could well be more tantalizing than Medhurst's unnecessary and uncalled-for intrusion into the little idyl which had begun, and was going on charmingly before he came to spoil everything. But yet Mrs. Haxtoun blamed herself. She had allowed insignificant impediments and fanciful objections to stand in her way when she should have struck a swift and effectual blow, and sent the young man out of the house. Her timidity concerning her husband had amounted to treachery towards her children's best interests. Her most powerful motive was overcome by the more feminine bias of wishing to please her husband and humor his self-love.

Lying by his side, all that short summer night, Mrs. Haxtoun thought, with impatience, of the many problems of her married life, and had an especial scorn for her feeble good-nature and general incompetence. She had begun by flattering his illusions; by listening as if, when he opened his lips, he spoke the profoundest wisdom; had fed his vanity and pampered his infirmities, until he fairly believed that the end of her life was to answer his preposterous claims upon her concession and endurance. He felt as if he were the family aggregate, and the other three, nearest and dearest to him, lived on his thoughts, fattened on what he liked, and cheerfully abjured what he abjured. And why should he not thus delude himself? Had she not given up everything? Had she not taught her children that they must cheerfully yield to their papa, lest he should possibly find things going wrong, and be depressed and put into a bad temper? When he intimated to his wife that he swayed the universe a little, had she not, with the sweetest cajolery, intimated that the universe might well be swayed by such a man? If he made himself disagreeable in society, with all the clearest consciousness in her own mind that he was cutting a bad figure, did she not blame all the world, and reinstate him in his own esteem?

Ah, how hard it was, thought poor Mrs. Haxtoun, to draw the line; to love, and give all, and do all; to suppress all personal sensitiveness and inclination, and widen every impulse until it became a beneficent river of sympathy for one's husband, and yet not make the balance of things go wrong! When Mr. Haxtoun turned on his pillow that morn-

ing, and found his wife gone from her place, he little knew how her night had been spent. Everybody who lives with us has an account-book of our doings and strivings, which they add up from time to time, balancing them against their own performances, rarely making out much in our favor, and generally putting down a tremendous deficit to square our account. But Mr. Haxtoun had never found this out; and that his wife was given to this sort of debit and credit kind of thing, and was about to right matters at last, was far from being vividly realized by his waking imagination.

She was not beside him, and this absence stirred an idea that it might be late; but, upon looking at his watch, he discovered that it was unusually early. He had half an hour to lie and meditate before he need bestir himself for bath and toilet. Many a great author has done half his work of the day when he was lying in bed; and Mr. Haxtoun, now, at once, without dribbling and wasting his fresh powers, turned his mind to the composition of a nobly turned paragraph for the opening of his tenth chapter, of which the heading and title had been written the day previous. He lay repeating various formulas to himself, rehearsing them over and over, satisfying his ear concerning their melody and rhythm, adding, rejecting, and qualifying. Mrs. Haxtoun, who had risen at sunrise, and had been sitting, unnerved and faint, from want of sleep, in the bay-window of the hall, reading the morning service and the lessons of the day, came in presently, and stood, for a moment, listening to the preamble: —

"It must be admitted that, although extravagant

pretensions have dazzled and carried away a certain order of minds, indifferent to the whole system and direction of close logic, and to the collected results of the best and maturest thought of ages, the knowledge it has taken centuries to accumulate."

By this time Mr. Haxtoun experienced the need of a secretary; it was difficult to keep both the roll and the sense, and to look up and see his wife at this juncture was a happy condition of affairs.

"Good-morning, dearest Jenny," said he. "Just oblige me by taking those tablets, and writing down this sentence. I don't wish to lose it." And he began again to roll forth, with appropriate elocution, "It must be admitted that, although extravagant pretensions have dazzled and carried away a certain order of minds, which — which — which — to — how did I have it? A certain order of minds, to whom — how was it? My dear Jenny, how unlucky that you should have interrupted me at that particular moment! I woke up with the most unusual flow of ideas, and now they seem quite upset. Let me begin again. It must be admitted that, although extravagant pretensions have dazzled and carried away a certain order of minds, indifferent to the whole system and direction of close logic, and the collected results of the best and maturest thought of ages, the knowledge it has taken centuries to accumulate, — that all makes good sense, does it not, my dear?"

"I really do not know," said Mrs. Haxtoun, tablet in hand, plaintively and querulously. "The sentence *sounds* to me already very long, and it seems to be only just begun."

"When a writer wishes to work out certain careful results, which he has carried through heats of controversy, he cannot sum up the thing like a mere general theorem, which nobody wishes to dispute. Profound meditations like mine, complete absorption in one grand, central idea, to which everything leads, and from which everything diverges, — make the perfection of a style. I have been much struck by Medhurst's conversion to my ideas. At first, he was all for brevity; wanted to strike out this and curtail that. He was bitten by the mania for paragraph writing, which our journalists have taken from the French. I have taught him better."

"My dear, I want to speak to you about Mr. Medhurst," said Mrs. Haxtoun, with a vigor and alacrity which might have startled her husband, had he not been engrossed.

"We have not finished that sentence, Jenny. I had it quite worked out in my mind before you came in. Hereafter, I think I will have the tablets lie here, by my watch, so that I can put my hand on them the first thing. I lose many valuable ideas from not jotting them down on the instant; I" —

"Leonard," said Mrs. Haxtoun, in a perfect agony of nervousness, "there is something I wish particularly to say to you."

"Do you really mean that I am quite to lose all that inspiration? If you should go away for about ten minutes I have no idea but what I could get it back; I" —

"Dear Leonard, what I have to say is most important" —

Mr. Haxtoun waved his hand and tried to smile.

"Say on, my dear," said he. "I have got a headache already; but no matter. I suppose it is something about some trifling household matter, about which I have neither knowledge nor theory."

"No," said Mrs. Haxtoun, impressively; "it is about your daughter."

"About Cecil? Surely there is nothing which calls for a tragic face in anything Cecil has done."

"It is about Cecil and Mr. Medhurst," whispered Mrs. Haxtoun. "O Leonard! if you love me, if you care for me and my peace of mind in any degree, send that young man out of the house."

"A most exemplary young man, — a most pleasing and agreeable fellow, — a most valuable acquisition," said Mr. Haxtoun, in a tone of the liveliest conviction. "Never in my life have I seen anything equal to his capacity for work, his ready acquisition and assimilation of ideas. And I can trust him better almost than I can myself, — he is never run away with by silly conceits and half-digested theories; he makes no mistakes; he says all the time, when my imagination threatens to run away with me, — 'Give me facts, facts, facts, facts.'"

"My dear," said Mrs. Haxtoun, to whom these statements were sufficiently conclusive in their way, but did not touch the point, "I dare say he may be useful to you; but he is making love to Cecil."

"Oh, no, Jenny! Why, when has he any time? He is utterly taken up with the book. Last night, now, I left him writing hard at half-past eleven, and he said he had at least an hour's work before him. I have never heard him speak of Cecil" —

"Speak of her! Why should he speak of her? What right has he even to look at her?"

"But he does not look at her. He" —

"Leonard, which do you think the better judge of a situation like this, a woman, a mother, — all the time on the alert for her daughter's happiness, — or" —

"My dear Jenny, I know my own powers of observation. I am not a dry bookworm. Although I am a writer, and am at work upon a book relating to abstruse and curious facts, traditions, and theories, the real force and power which give me inspiration come from my swift insight, my unerring knowledge of character, my absolutely feminine instincts. If Medhurst had a thought of anything beyond the Aryan epics I should long since have discovered it. He throws himself into the labor with an intensity, an abandon, which proves conclusively that no romantic fancies have the least power over him. Not that I should especially object to his marrying Cecil; it might" —

Mrs. Haxtoun could have shrieked, if all her actions were not governed by the most absolute good taste and quietness. She felt dizzy with wrath, mortification, and a growing sense of the difficulty of her undertaking.

"It might," he pursued, after taking a comprehensive view of the situation, "be a great help and convenience to have Medhurst always at hand to help on my great" —

Mr. Haxtoun paused abruptly, happening for the first time to observe something in his wife's face and manner which perplexed him. It occurred to him

that she was at one moment flushed, and the next pale; that she seemed to be trembling; that she was charged with some mission, or actuated by some idea, which agitated her.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he exclaimed. "What is it, Jenny? It gives me a palpitation of the heart to have disagreeable subjects forced upon me before breakfast. Nothing that I eat will digest. I shall have an uncomfortable day, and I shall not sleep to-night. You know that I am always ready to give you the fullest sympathy; but it really seems to me that you ought to consult my wretched state of health a little in your times and seasons."

Mrs. Haxtoun quite broke down. These recurrent demands for apology and self-justification quenched her spirit. Still she resolved to concentrate herself, and make an attack.

"Dear Leonard," she exclaimed, with tears, "there are times when we must forget ourselves; when we cannot allow our love of ease and self-indulgence to rob us of our self-respect. It will not do to be monomaniacs with one fixed idea, and wear blinkers, which permit us to see only one spot in the world."

Mr. Haxtoun, who so far had been bolstered up by the pillows, sat up in bed.

"A monomaniac, with one fixed idea," he repeated. "I — I don't quite understand you, Jenny."

"Don't fancy I meant anything personal. I" —

"Oh, no! A monomaniac, with one fixed idea," he said again, the force of the expression gathering strength by the repetition of it aloud. "Blinkers, which permit me to see only one spot in the world" —

Mrs. Haxtoun had concentrated her powers with a vengeance. She had not only struck the arrow home, but had hammered it in. A little bitterness had been gathering in the good lady's heart during all these years of self-repression; she may have relieved herself at times by little mental epigrammatic touches, and had her revenge upon her husband by a sort of terse criticism of his failings. But she hardly knew herself when she uttered them aloud.

"My dear Leonard," she faltered, I" —

"Suppose, Jenny," said Mr. Haxtoun, with awful majesty, "we should give up recriminations and invective, and regard the subject in hand. There was something, perhaps, you wanted to ask me; if not, I think if you will step in the next room I will get up."

Mrs. Haxtoun felt lost in infinite dismay at her own perverse temper, and thoroughly realized that she had injured her cause. She at last had the field to herself, and her husband was ready to listen; but her story, when it came out, was disjointed, incoherent, meaningless. When he questioned her, as he did with merciless skill, she perpetually found herself in a maze of contradictions and uncertainties. When he asked for facts, she had no facts. She knew of no word Medhurst had said to her daughter which might not be spoken before all the world; and yet she felt so certain that something the young man had said, something the young man had done, had tricked the young girl's heart away. Thus looked at, any trifle had seemed portentous; but, when offered to this stern Radamanthus, it did not carry a feather's weight.

"I really cannot see what your objection to my secretary is, my dear," Mr. Haxtoun finally said. "Cecil speaks to him occasionally, as if he were a living human being. She went rowing on the river with him by her own invitation. If she met him in the garden, last night, she seems to have been looking for him."

"He is too good-looking to have about the house," she interposed.

"If your sex is so weak-minded that the presence of a good-looking young man cannot be borne" —

"My dear!"

It was long past the time when Mr. Haxtoun was in the habit of emerging from his room, carefully shaven and dressed, for his turn on the piazza, or terrace, before breakfast; and his wife began to understand that it was better for her to retire and leave the contest a drawn battle. Her husband was soft and plaintive; but she knew his look, which meant a refusal to accept any opinion or valuation except his own, and that he was irritated, and on the lookout for pretexts for offence.

"You will think of what I have told you, I am sure, Leonard," she said, offering him a chance for a truce. "There is Mr. Heriot, almost on the point of declaring himself" —

"Mr. Heriot I should not consider an eligible son-in-law."

Mr. Haxtoun certainly had a genius for torturing his wife. She had carefully abstained from bringing in Rodney Heriot's name before, lest it might do mischief; but she had believed it wise for her to offer this suggestion just as she was on the point of

retreating, that in his mental survey of the situation that argument might have the fullest force.

She could say no more, and she went out without another word. It quite broke her heart to see how little sympathy there was between her and her husband on vital questions. Mr. Heriot not an eligible son-in-law! No special objection to Cecil's marrying Medhurst!

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. HAXTOUN'S DIPLOMACY.

THREE hours later Mr. Haxtoun had in a measure regained his mental equilibrium, which he had lost when confronted with the spectre raised by his wife's words. For a moment it had taken on a shape which was a hideous caricature of himself, and he had, with a bewildered sense, recognized the monomaniac with a fixed idea, wearing blinkers which hid everything in the world except the spot before his own eyes. But, after dressing with unusual haste, breakfasting with what poor appetite he might, and smoking his cigar on the terrace outside, impressions regained their force; the quick currents of irritation along his nerves of sensation subsided. His wife came and addressed him with timidity and longing in her glance and tone, and, though he still felt an inarticulate and smouldering resentment, he answered with right royal condescension. She hated to differ with him, no matter how just her quarrel might be; the interest and sweetness of life were flatly dispersed unless she could feel that he was easy and comfortable. Mr. Haxtoun said this, and felt that he must be magnanimous. There was clearly a right and wrong in every subject, and he had never known anybody to

be in the right who differed from himself. Still, women had their little ambitions, their little personal inclinations, and a man should not inflict too bitter a disappointment upon them. The pretty creatures needed to be served when they might be, dominated only when they must be.

Accordingly, after answering his wife's little phrases about the flowers and the gardener's new schemes, he said, averting his eyes a little: —

"By the way, Jenny, since you wish it, I will find out from Medhurst what he has been doing in that matter, and if" —

"And, if it is as I fear, will you not insist that he shall go away, at least for a time?"

Mr. Haxtoun nodded. "That might be best. I will speak to him, at any rate, and let you know what he says."

This undertaking did not dismay the old gentleman. He knew his own diplomatic gifts, and that he was the shrewdest and most experienced of men where any knowledge of character or motives was concerned. He burned, too, with zeal, to reinstate himself in his wife's good opinion, and could predict with scientific precision exactly what he should have to tell her. He disliked to break up his secretary's morning work; but routine must occasionally give way, and he hoped, by this concession, to secure a peaceful life for the future.

Medhurst was at his desk when Mr. Haxtoun entered the study, and looked up with a salutation.

"Hard at it!" said the old gentleman. "How little those about us know of what is going on within these four walls! The chattering of the

parlor seems unimportant enough, looked at from our point of view."

"You were so late I began to be afraid you might be ill," said Medhurst, not replying to his patron's remark.

"I am not well; I am, in fact, more than half ill. I was disturbed soon after I awoke, and that always does me harm. There is a painful buzzing in my head, and I feel languid."

"It is a warm morning."

"Heat agrees with me," said Mr. Haxtoun, solemnly, and at once took up the subject physiologically. Medhurst could not possibly imagine what his employer meant by coming in at that hour of the day, planting himself in a chair so close to him that their knees almost touched, and at once insisting upon conversation. He had two passions, — one for his book, and the other for interminable harangues; but while in the study it was his habit to adhere strictly to the matter in hand. But now he was evidently bent on discourse. Medhurst took up his sheets, laid them down, picked imaginary straws out of his inkstand, took a new pen, tried it, and exchanged it for another. He yawned; he sighed; he looked out of the window, and affected to be profoundly interested in his own thoughts. But Mr. Haxtoun's flow of dissertation never once stopped. He at first discussed his health, with the nicest and most particular account of the condition of his various organs; and, after proving conclusively that he had a chronic disease in each, he did not refrain from telling with what strength of

mind he bore these inevitable ills, and with what fortitude he put suffering by, and applied himself to his great work. Not, however, that with all his absorption in the great question concerning the identity of the Aryan epics, he lived an egoistic, isolated existence, cut off from the joys and sorrows of his family and his kind. He was no mere shadow of his great idea; he was a whole man, heart, mind, sense, all open to beautiful and vivid impressions of life.

"What can he be driving at?" thought Medhurst within himself; but he listened imperturbably, making no attempt to stem the tide of eloquence, save by an occasional "Certainly," or, "It would seem so." The young man, as he sat there, cast an occasional glance from the window, and saw Cecil on the lawn with Rodney Heriot. There was to be an archery and tennis party the following day, and they, with Alec, were directing the gardener how to lay out the grounds. Medhurst was not unused to this sort of spectacle, which occasionally made him feel like a school-boy, shut out of the sunshiny place where his mates were playing; but, as a rule, he was compelled to be rigorously absorbed in the work before him, and had no time to indulge in fancies. Now, with his faculties quite unemployed, except in pondering the problem of Mr. Haxtoun's unusual mood, he allowed his thoughts to settle upon Cecil, and let his memory bring up one picture of her after another. Comparing his late impressions of her with his first, the effect was complicated and inharmonious. She puzzled him, and, let him try

as he might to attribute the fluctuations in her behavior to girlish caprice, he could not make that account for all he had seen in her face, in the swift withdrawing of her eyes, in the unaccountable changes of color.

Remembering certain of her speeches he was ready to accuse her of coquetry, and at the recurrence of this idea something hard and bitter came into his mind against her. The thought touched him to the quick, and he experienced a rancor, which showed that, in spite of the philosophy and indifference with which he tried to accept the accidents of his life, he was, in point of fact, just as youthful, susceptible, and suspicious as ever, and at the mercy of every adverse wind which might chance to blow. To exchange this notion of Cecil's coquetry for another, namely, that she might feel some particular interest in him, — pity, sympathy, what not, — was equally disturbing.

By this time Mr. Haxtoun began to think that he had said enough in the way of preamble, and that his various digressions had taken a sufficient range to allow him to slip with ease into almost any fresh channel.

"And how is it with you, my young friend?" he now proceeded to ask; "what is your outlook upon life?"

"Eh, what?" faltered Medhurst, brought back to present realities by the subsidence of the continuous droning murmur, and the inflection of the final sentence, which seemed to denote that a question had been asked. "I beg your pardon, — I did not quite catch your last sentence."

"I was inquiring," resumed Mr. Haxtoun, "how you regarded these things; what was your estimate of the future; what you were eager to lift the veil for, and find behind it?"

"I assure you," said Medhurst, dryly, "that I have no outlook, — none. As for lifting the veil of the future I much prefer to know nothing of what lurks behind it. Having caught sight of the skeleton I might be less easy in my mind than I am now."

"You do not think of marriage?"

"Marriage!" exclaimed Medhurst, angrily. He looked at Mr. Haxtoun, and began to believe there was something in all this more than met the ear. "Whom should I marry?"

Mr. Haxtoun had been gentle, vague, and diffuse, and to have what he liked to have spread over a large extent of territory, all at once centred and brought to a point in this way, was almost irritating. Medhurst had fairly turned upon him as if goaded and stung. "Whom should I marry?" he went on, pressing the point; but then, seeing the dismay expressed in the old gentleman's face, he governed his sudden rage. "I would tell you," he now said, with a half-laugh, "if I thought of such a thing. You have bought my time, my services, my brain, and I really consider that if my heart were engaged elsewhere it would be only fair to let you know."

"There may be something in that," observed Mr. Haxtoun. "Head and heart could not well be at war with advantage to the work."

"No." Both seemed to feel a certain embarrassment. Some of those useful meaningless phrases

with which a man covers his purpose, as a fox brushes over his tracks with his tail, rose to Mr. Haxtoun's lips. He wanted to carry it off with a little jocularity, and show the young man that it was a mere passing joke; but something about Medhurst, sombre and serious, almost frightened him. He looked at him uncomfortably, and said not a word.

"May I inquire if you had any special meaning in putting that question to me?" Medhurst asked, after a time.

He hardly knew why his heart was beating strongly, why a stern, angry bitterness seemed to actuate him. He thought it was because he resented the intrusiveness of this question as if it had been an impertinence. But then, he reflected, Mr. Haxtoun had always been kind and friendly, and had in every way made him feel that he never wished to be either inquisitive or dictatorial.

"You seem to take it as if I had introduced some searching and powerful question," Mr. Haxtoun now rallied his powers sufficiently to make reply. "Had you not been thinking of marriage you would hardly make a grievance of my allusion to it. All men marry, so to speak. And it is more than a little singular that we are inclined to treat the one vital fact of existence, which has made tradition and history, inspired the poets, created literature, as if it were a trivial incident in our own cases to pooh-pooh, and smile away. I might cite many authorities to prove" —

"Let me tell you," said Medhurst, "as man to man, that I have been thinking about marriage of

late; that is, whether under a certain combination of circumstances a man should feel it his duty to offer marriage; whether it is cowardice to run away from it."

"Run away from it?" repeated Mr. Haxtoun, blankly.

"Precisely. I don't in the faintest degree believe that I am worth any woman's acceptance; but my doubt is, whether I ought not to offer her the chance of refusing me."

Mr. Haxtoun began to feel very ill. His head swam, and he leaned it back against the cushion of his chair. There was a little pallor about his lips as he observed, "You seem to be in a singular dilemma."

There was something very strange and very disquieting to Medhurst in this remark. He took it for granted that Mr. Haxtoun was alluding to Mrs. Dalton, and his wonder grew as to the means by which this unobservant old gentleman had become acquainted with his state of mind.

"I confess," said he, "that I have not usually taken the subject close to heart. When I am with her I occasionally ask myself what I mean; but when I am away from her I see clearly enough that what she means is something quite different from binding herself down to a poor man. Honestly, Mr. Haxtoun, I feel this. I am one of those unlucky devils who had better throw himself into the sea than to think of marrying any woman." Medhurst spoke with some heat, and seemed chafed by some internal conflict of feeling. But there was

not the least glimmering sign of love or sentiment in his face, or in his voice.

"You see, Mr. Haxtoun," he now added, "that I understand your allusion. How you gained any idea of what I had supposed was entirely my own secret I will not ask. If this hint of yours had come from any one else I should have considered it intrusive; but I owe it to you to be candid. If you have any wish, even any commands, in the matter, let me know them, and I will try to carry them out. I begin to see what it all means. I spoke to your daughter, — that is — she had heard something, and questioned me; and Miss Haxtoun, no doubt, told her mother, and she" —

Mr. Haxtoun's jaw had fallen. He gazed at Medhurst, stricken dumb.

"If," continued Medhurst, with a half-laugh, "you want me to end the matter by going over and asking her this moment, whether she will or will not marry me, I will do just what you say. To doubt the situation is annoying to lookers-on. If she accepts me I will go away; I shall need to make new plans at once. If she refuses me — as I have not the smallest doubt she will — we can go on with the book without interruptions."

"Go over to see her, — go over where?" gasped Mr. Haxtoun.

"I suppose she is at Mrs. Esté's."

"Are you alluding to Mrs. Dalton?"

"I am."

Mr. Haxtoun revived; that is, he experienced an almost intoxicating sense of relief, which quite overcame him. He started up, nervous and unstrung, tit-

tering faintly. He was too happy to care particularly about the vista his hints might have opened up to Medhurst, if he saw fit to study their meaning. There was something inspiring to the old gentleman in the fact that, on the unique occasion when his wife had chosen to assert herself, she was utterly in the wrong. Under the sway of maternal instinct everything in creation is over-bold and aggressive, and Mrs. Haxtoun might be pardoned for such an exuberance of apprehensiveness. By forcing her husband to take the initiative against Medhurst's pretensions she had entangled him in a delicate dilemma; but he was ready to forgive her. A mo nomaniac, with a fixed idea," the old gentleman chuckled to himself. "Blinkers which let a person see only one spot in the world." He burned with impatience to look up his wife, and prove to her, by these incontestable confessions, that Medhurst was on the point of offering himself to Mrs. Dalton; that, so far from being in love with Cecil, he had never once thought of her, but had been enduring a conflict of ideas about the widow, and, tossed about and torn by contrary instincts, had been almost glad of some outside pressure, which should force him into action.

But before Mr. Haxtoun could rush into his wife's presence, and reinstate himself in her belief as a far-seeing and deep-reaching observer, it was essential to say something to Medhurst, who was regarding his dead silence with some surprise.

"My dear young friend," said he, "your words tell me a story, — a story which touches me deeply. But do not act rashly. What you suggest is a mat-

ter requiring serious thought; your feeling of haste comes from your pride, which is rather exaggerated. By all means, wait and see, — wait and see."

Medhurst stared at him, frankly puzzled. He began to wonder how his confession had been brought about, and was obliged to own that he had committed himself without due provocation. But the allusion to marriage had been so sudden, so uncalled for, it had roused all his slumbering doubts, dreads, and irritations. Many a time of late, while talking to Fanny Dalton, he had called himself either a knave or a sickly sentimentalist, and had impugned both his sense and his honor for letting the flirtation, if so it might be called, drift on. There had seemed to be a swiftly piercing intention in Mr. Haxtoun's manner, at least, and Medhurst had given him credit for extraordinary subtlety. After a moment's supreme hesitation, as to whether it was worth while to try to make the matter clearer, Medhurst decided to, at least, postpone all further allusion to his personal affairs. He rose.

"Since we seem to have taken a holiday," he now said, "if you have nothing on hand at present I think I will go out for a walk."

"Do so, do so, by all means," returned Mr. Haxtoun, who was eager to end the interview.

Medhurst was off like lightning, and the old gentleman, on his side, sought his wife with feet which hardly seemed to touch the earth.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SONATA BY BEETHOVEN.

MRS. DALTON was expending a good deal of time and earnestness upon the private theatricals. She had many reasons for feeling a keener interest in them than others, for she had more at stake. She was in the habit of talking a good deal *en l'air*, as one might say, and floated a great many balloons, to which she gave only a moment's lease of life. Her idea, however, of going on the stage was borne up by a lively personal ambition, considerable aptitude, and the necessity in some way of gaining wealth for herself. She never read an item in the papers concerning the almost fabulous amounts made by certain successful actresses and singers of the period, without a spasm of envy and longing contracting her heart. She, too, longed to have the public at her feet; she had always enjoyed the feeling that she had spectators when she merely crossed the room; and to have not only an admiring, but a remunerative, audience, — to have the effect of her wit, grace, and good looks, paid down every night in gold and bank-bills, — that represented for her the acme of profitable existence. The only drawback was the fact that she had not begun young enough, and that the life of

an actress would demand incessant energy and hard work. She was, besides, uncertain whether she had it in her to create a part. She could follow, she could imitate, most successfully; but originality is the true force.

Thus Rodney Heriot's play had given her far more trouble than if it were one which had already been acted, and concerning which there were traditions. He gave her the advantage of his own views, however; he read the play to her, and heard her read it. He took the trouble even to go through certain scenes with her. The manager was to come shortly, and, after his arrival, regular rehearsals would be held twice a day on the stage. The scene-painting had by this time progressed to a point which showed that Rodney was prompt in performance, at least; and to-day he brought Medhurst in to show him what sort of effects he had produced. He happened to come upon the secretary while he was idling away his day in the woods. The truth was that Medhurst, after his interview with Mr. Haxtoun in the preceding chapter, had found his morning spoiled even for a walk, and Rodney had brought him along without much compulsion. The stage had been erected in a sort of alcove of the picture-gallery, where the water-colors usually hung, and the whole main room was to become the auditorium.

"Now stand there," said Rodney, as they entered, "and I will have the first three scenes displayed. If they can bear this mid-day glare they will pass by lamplight."

While the two stood at the door the swish of

a long train was heard upon the stage, and Mrs. Dalton came down from the left wing, speaking in a low, but clear, tone; in fact, rehearsing her part.

"Well, well," she said, "and how shall I receive him? There is so much in the first impression; let the heart first give a push either way, towards love or disgust, and half the battle is fought. Shall I sit? No; I would rather be moving. I will walk; yes, that shall be it. I'll walk away from the door of the conservatory as he enters, and then turn back and meet him. No, that might be too abrupt. I will be neither sitting, standing, nor walking; I will be lying down; I will stretch myself almost at full length on the crimson couch, with the cushions behind my head. No, I will not be quite lying down, — I will be lifting myself on one elbow, and one foot shall be dangling, for these are my prettiest slippers and stockings. Yes, one foot shall show, like that, — not too much, not boldly, but delicately, — and then I will start and be surprised. Oh, the surprise will be easy to manage, jumping up with the consciousness that I was caught in such a way! Yes, that is best."

Rodney roared with laughter, and then clapped his hands.

"Bravo! bravo!" he cried; "nothing could be better, Fanny."

"Oh, are you there?" said Mrs. Dalton. "And you, too, Cousin Frank? Did it really sound well?"

"Nothing could be better. It seemed as if we

had stumbled in upon one of your own private meditations."

"No, I assure you, I never have to try one thing after the other. My instinct is unerring."

"You always knew just how to strike home. I brought Medhurst in to look at the scenery. Here, John, just put up that first scene, — the garden and terrace, and house behind."

Fanny gave a little jump from the stage and joined the two on the floor, — she could do such things bewitchingly, — while the servant wheeled the various canvasses on and off, showing first the terrace of Mrs. Chalcote's house, then the parlor, and next a view of the park where the archery party was to be held. They were fairly painted, it seemed to Medhurst.

"I don't know what there is you can't do, Heriot," he exclaimed.

"Do? I can't do anything decently."

"You have written a clever play."

"Written it? It is a rehash of Sardou, Robertson, Scribe, and Congreve. There is hardly an original word in it."

"It is cleverly adapted, at all events. And you certainly painted these scenes."

"But from copies. That wood is a view of a little nook in Fontainebleau forest, and the terrace is our own, — you noticed that?"

"It did not occur to me."

"You see, then, what my skill amounts to."

"I don't know how Cousin Frank should have any idea of the terrace," said Mrs. Dalton. "He never comes near the house."

"He will have to do so when the rehearsals begin."

"Do you mean to say you still count on me to take that part?"

"Certainly I do. Nobody else is available."

"I don't know," said Medhurst; "I am not certain whether I ought to or not. Don't fancy that I am making myself of undue importance; but reflect that my time is not my own."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Rodney. "I'll put it in the right light with Mr. and Mrs. Haxtoun, if you mean that."

"I" — Medhurst began.

"Don't say another word. I will go and put on my blouse and paint a little. You can entertain him, Fanny. He will stay to dinner."

Medhurst felt the pleasantness of this easy fashion of hospitality. He was disinclined to go back to the three-o'clock meal at the Haxtouns', and yielded to Rodney's suggestion with a good grace. It was dim here and cool; he was sitting on a deeply cushioned sofa, and was disinclined to move. Rodney had quickly slipped into a suit of dark-blue velveteen, and, mounted on a high stool, was sketching, with plenty of boldness, the bank of a river, humming all the time a pretty air set to an old madrigal.

"He is a wonderful fellow," Medhurst said to Fanny; "with a little touch of something or other one need not undertake to define, he would have genius.'

"He has got it already. He has never had to use

his powers," said Fanny. "It is a lucky thing for the world that most of us clever people are poor."

"Don't count me in," said Medhurst. "I have always considered that I might have been something if I had not been driven to earn my daily bread. When I have five thousand dollars ahead I shall be able to breathe. I can then, perhaps, decide whether I will return to my early notion of studying law. I may think best to do it, and may not."

Fanny looked at him lazily.

"Have you anything like five thousand dollars?"

"Yes. If I stay here six months longer I shall have it made up. My book may help a little."

"You have saved money?"

"All I could."

Having said this Medhurst waited for her to reply. He had decided to tell her so much. He owed it to her, perhaps, to let her know whatever thoughts or expectations he had concerning his future.

"How little that would amount to in this house!" Fanny exclaimed. "They are so awfully, so abominably rich here. Five thousand dollars seems to me a mere bagatelle just at present, when I am used to writing Mrs. Esté's orders to her milliners in Paris."

"This sort of life was your *beau idéal*, Fanny?"

"Precisely."

Medhurst made a gesture towards Rodney, who was trolling out, —

> "Since first I saw your face, I resolved
> To honor and renown you."

"He is the man you ought to have captivated."

"And do you consider him so very indifferent to me?" Fanny demanded, with an air of pique.

"Certainly not. But, considering that he is on the point of being engaged, if not already engaged"—

"Don't you do some slight violence to your own feelings in making that statement?" she demanded, with a peculiar smile.

"Violence to my own feelings? I do not know what you mean."

"I cannot believe that you are absolutely indifferent to that pretty young creature."

The color came and went in Medhurst's face.

"Do not — do not, I beg of you!" he exclaimed, with a vehemence that surprised himself.

She was watching him closely, and at his entreaty a little trembling flitted across her features, which she seemed unable to control. She steadied herself, however, and it passed away.

"The girl is in love with you," she said, speaking in the softest possible voice, her eyes almost hidden beneath their half-closed lids. "I saw it from the first. You have but to put out your hand, and you could draw her to you."

Medhurst grew frightfully pale. He made an effort to speak, but no sound came from his lips. His hat had fallen to the floor, and he stooped and picked it up, then rose to his feet.

"You are not going," said Fanny; "you agreed to stay."

He seemed irresolute, and sat down again.

"Have I done wrong in telling you this?" asked Fanny, leaning forward and speaking earnestly. "If so, I ask your forgiveness; I am ready to ask

your forgiveness on my knees. But, after seeing what I have seen, knowing what I know, how could I keep silence? And, believe me, — after — after all I made you suffer, it was a sort of consolation to me to think of you as loving, and beloved by, a fresh young heart."

"There is nothing of the kind," declared Medhurst. "I cannot understand your allusions."

He looked dangerous. The harness Fanny had thrown over him did not fit him at all. The bit was in his mouth, however; and, let him stamp, froth, and make play as he would, she knew that he could not free himself. She had not known how he would take it, but she had hardly expected all this fire and revolt. Some struggle was going on within him which she could not measure except by these signs of wrath. All was uncertainty and confusion in his thoughts, she could see that.

"I saw a change in you at first," said Fanny. "I watched a little. 'Is he in love with that young girl?' I asked myself. I saw soon enough how it was with her. She loves you, — I tell you she loves you with all her foolish, fond, little heart."

He was trembling.

"If," said he, in a faint voice, "if I thought that, it would be my duty to go away, — to go away instantly."

Fanny looked at him incredulously.

"Are you as half-hearted as that?" she cried, with a swift, piercing intonation. "I should have believed you capable of being a good lover, at all events."

"Whatever I am, I am, I hope, incapable of

dishonor, and I should feel a stinging sense of treachery in going on here with that idea in my mind."

Fanny had miscalculated a little. She had wished to throw a firebrand, but had not supposed it likely to alight in a powder magazine.

"Do not punish me in this way," she now exclaimed, with no exaggerated terror depicted on her face. "I thought — I thought I might be doing you a service."

"If she were free as air," said Medhurst, "I should have no right to think of her; and now — Why," he added, looking at Rodney, who, standing on his stool, was brandishing his crayon, and shouting: —

> "'If now I be disdained, I wish
> My heart had never known you'" —

— "he is in love with her."

Fanny felt with annoyance and confusion that she had put forces in action of which she had not dreamed. All this fine feeling seemed to her to spring from no inadequate causes. The sort of friendship Medhurst seemed to entertain for Rodney had not entered into her calculations at all.

"I wish," she said, with some emotion, "that I had not spoken. But old and dear friends as we are" —

"Look here, Fanny!" said Medhurst. "You do not understand me. When, a little while ago, I spoke of my future, — of my beginning to make an actual career for myself, — I thought of you and of you alone."

"I did not know you ever thought of me in these days," said Fanny.

"But you see I do."

"You have almost avoided me."

"Intercourse between us means too much or too little. I felt that I had no right to see you, to make allusions to our past and to my own feelings in that past, without some definite speech and promise about the future. I" —

"Do not go on," cried Fanny. "I do not know what you feel precisely, nor do I wish to know — just yet. I like to see you — to talk to you freely. Don't feel that there is any necessity for even thinking about the future." She was leaning close to him, with a bright, friendly face, a charming brilliancy in her eyes, and a gay, caressing smile on her lips. "Forget all that I said," she whispered. "Don't dream of any necessity for going away."

He said nothing. She sprang up.

"Now," she exclaimed, "I'll say my part to you. I am not perfect yet. There is time to go through one scene. You read that, please, — or at least give me the cues."

She walked about ten feet away, and began one of the monologues in which her part abounded. He was struck by the sort of electrical and involuntary force which came into her voice, look, and gesture, as she moved up and down. As for himself it was difficult to keep his attention fixed upon the little strip of paper in his hand and attend to the *rôle* he had assumed. The dialogue was between Mrs. Chalcote and Henri, whose part was to be taken by Alec Haxtoun. Probably no scene in the play would

afford Fanny a better chance for the display of her peculiar powers than this. Henri had become suspicious and restless; he began to see that he had rivals, and pressed upon Adela the necessity of putting an end to his suspense, and making it either happiness or despair. His accusations she met with a volley of sparkling impertinences.

"What! I am not to have as many lovers as I choose? Treat them as I choose? Amuse myself at them, or with them, as I choose?"

Medhurst could hardly read the part assigned him. He did not know of what or whom he was thinking. It was not of Fanny; her arch, coquettish looks, her incessant laughter, irritated and troubled him. Her words seemed an echo of something once realized, but half-forgotten; there was a painful violence to his feelings in trying to go through Henri's answers. The effect became more and more hideous all the time that Fanny was increasing in mischief, in spirit, in *abandon*. She paused suddenly, and burst into ringing laughter.

"You don't seem to enjoy it," she said.

"The thing is quite out of my line. I have no dramatic talent now."

"You excel in love-making when you feel the emotion," she said, in a soft, coquettish whisper.

He flung down the paper he held. He began to believe that she was trying to torment him, and resolved to hold his own against either her malice or her fascinations.

She accepted his decision that they had had enough of the rehearsal, and, in fact, a servant came to

announce that dinner would be upon the table in ten minutes.

Rodney clambered down from his stool, and asked Medhurst to go upstairs with him.

When they descended Mrs. Dalton was in Mrs. Esté's *boudoir*, and they all moved in to dinner together.

The meal was so simple that Mrs. Esté almost apologized to Medhurst. They kept a French cook, at a great salary, for nothing, she affirmed. Rodney ate little, and Fanny Dalton almost lived upon cream; while, as for herself, she took nothing save *bouillon* and juicy beef.

"And, in Europe, Rodney used to begin with *caviare* and olives stuffed with anchovies," she explained plaintively.

"Don't omit absinthe," put in Rodney. "Make me out as bad as you can. But reflect, Medhurst, that in those happy days I did not dine — if you call such a thing as this dining — at three o'clock in the day."

"It does not sound polite," said Fanny, "but a dinner at three o'clock does not seem to belong to this house."

"But then," said Mrs. Esté, "when I was here all alone I never used actually to dine, and to have a simple meal at seven o'clock, with the chandelier lighted, and the men standing about, was dreary and absurd. When Rodney came I was ready to make any changes, but he insisted on going on in the old way. People about us do it, and it is inconvenient to vary from the accepted hours of the neighborhood."

"You see I am a reformed sinner," observed Rodney; "and reformed sinners have to become puritans in order to impress people with the fact of their penitence. Prince Henry had to cut all his oldest and dearest friends in order to get up his credit; but I had only to take to early hours, mutton-chops and potatoes, and a veil was drawn at once over my peccadilloes."

"How grateful I ought to be that you did not give me up!" said Fanny. "Had you virtuously said, 'I know you not, old man; fall to your prayers,' I should not have been the fortunate person I am at present."

Medhurst heard the voices buzzing around him with no clear idea of what anybody was saying. Rodney began to talk about the novel, "Bettering Opportunity"; but no effort could make the thing seem definite and real to his own mind. Rodney had read the book and liked it, and Mrs. Esté discoursed about the hero with little shrieks of admiration: —

"A genuine man! Made of actual flesh and blood! What an intellect! What a heart! And so revolted by the dishonesty, the insincerity, the want of spirituality, in the life about him!"

"I don't know whether I like the book or not," said Fanny. "I was all the time looking for your own traits, Frank; the incidents in your own life. When you moralized, I said, 'Now he means this or that.'"

"I expected to hear you say, 'Now he means me!'" said Rodney, and they both laughed. Medhurst smiled indifferently. He could not throw off

his reserve, and felt, when addressed, as if encased in a triple suit of armor, which left him no freedom; but the others did not seem to find his mood out of the usual. Rodney was in high spirits, and Fanny Dalton was both radiant and gay. An incessant play of wit and badinage went on between the two, in which Mrs. Esté joined, and tried to carry the guest along with her. But the conversation was made up of that sort of coterie talk, which, with its perpetual allusions and its half-said things, leaves an outsider absolutely dull and helpless. It was Medhurst's first actual perception of the intimacy which existed between Rodney Heriot and Mrs. Dalton. He had known, in an indefinite way, that they were old friends; but now he discovered that, even during her married life, Fanny had, summer after summer, gone abroad with Mrs. Esté, and met Rodney when he joined his mother at her Italian villa. The two had been associated in all sorts of ideas and enterprises, and seemed to have so much in common that a new significance was suddenly put into the free and easy intercourse for the looker-on. There was hardly a limit to Fanny's coquetry, and when it seemed slightly to overstep the boundary she would say, with a laugh and a glance at Mrs. Esté, "When a man is in love with another woman it makes no difference what one says to him."

"I wouldn't waste my ammunition on him, then," Mrs. Esté remarked once, with her little, petulant air.

"I will not," Fanny replied, with a shrug. "It is absolutely a shame he should care nothing about

me. Still, you must confess that it keeps him in good-humor, and teaches him how to behave his best when he really has to serve on his knees, so" —

"I will go down on my knees to you this moment, Fanny, if you say so," said Rodney.

They were rising from table, and went out on the porch to take their coffee. It was by this time almost five o'clock, and the long shadows had crept across the terraces and lawn, and the water below was dark and rayless. Where Medhurst sat he could see the filmy reaches of the upper river, which took the sunlight and vanished into a silvery haze. Mrs. Esté drank her coffee, and then went to sleep in her reclining-chair; the three others settled into quiet, and when conversation began again it was Medhurst who started it. He had it all to himself, however, for the ten minutes he tried to keep it up, and he began to believe that he had become as prolix and as monotonous as Mr. Haxtoun himself. Rodney listened to him with a bright eye and an occasional word, but his thoughts were evidently elsewhere, and Medhurst sat upon thorns until he found a chance to abandon his subject. Mrs. Dalton made a lovely picture, in her white dress, under the red awnings; but she had exerted herself quite enough for the present, and no effort could elicit more than a lazy smile from her.

"Would it bore you if I played in the distance?" Rodney asked presently, in a sleepy voice; and at Medhurst's word he went off to the library.

"Make yourself comfortable, Frank," said Fanny, good-naturedly. "Loll, put your feet up, and your

hands in your pockets, if you choose. One hates to have a dull hour and a stiff hour at the same time."

Rodney had taken his violin. He began to play softly and pensively, with an air of reverie, through which stray fancies whispered, giving a suggestion of immense sweetness. It was dreamy, melodious, and tender, but he soon tired of it. "Fanny," his voice was heard calling, "come and try a sonata with me."

Fanny rose, with a little grimace, raising her eyebrows and shrugging her shoulders as she passed Medhurst. He was left alone, for Mrs. Esté's maid had come out and wheeled in the sleeping old lady out of reach of the river-breeze. He was glad to be alone. He seemed for the past two hours to have been in a state of suspended animation. He had not been able to think connectedly nor to speak with what seemed to him intelligence or comprehension. He had made a vigorous effort to reject the idea Fanny had offered, but it was not so easily dispelled. In fact, his whole consciousness had been invaded by it on the instant; and to run away from it, to deny it, to refuse it, did not in the least alter the fact that it was the very kernel of his present sensation, thought, and life. Everything else was far off. There was a joyous violence in the way old and indefinite impressions suddenly grew vivid; meeting, separating, mingling together. At least he must examine the idea, and determine its logical value, and its bearing upon his duty. But the fact was, that his mind was at present like a hitherto undiscovered country, in which he had a half right to some rich inheritance, unmapped, without barriers,

boundaries, roads, or sign-posts; inviting, but at the same time denying his claims; tantalizing him with a promise of possession, to which he felt morally certain in his own mind he had neither birthright nor title-deeds. He was just in the mood to hear music. It opened instantaneously the heights, depths, and far perspectives which he could not realize with his unaided imagination. But the strains served, nevertheless, as an invocation to spirits he might not find it easy again to dismiss. Fanny was carrying along a theme of Beethoven's upon the piano, while Rodney adorned it with fantastic little caprices, delicate turns, blissful suggestions, wild, delicate impulses; then, when joy had moved it to its fullest, the violin in turn took up the story, and told it in its own way. What had been pure joy became the burden of a heart ravished with its own happiness; a happiness it longs for, craves, but cannot claim. The last two or three hours' experience had swept away all Medhurst's former world of ideas. That morning he had believed he was in some measure bound to Fanny, while Heriot thought only of Miss Haxtoun. Neither of these beliefs remained to him now as an essential base of action. Heriot and Fanny were wrapped up in each other. Let them go; he wanted to be alone in the world with Cecil.

Suddenly a pertinacious idea arose in his mind. He recalled Mr. Haxtoun's talk with him a few hours before; at the time he had been so oppressed by the fancy that other people were bent on recalling him to his old vows to Fanny, that he had not once reflected upon the probabilities of the matter. He

saw it clearly now. Mr. Haxtoun had not thought of Mrs. Dalton at all; what his mind had been busy with was the question of his secretary's relations to his daughter. Medhurst felt that, in fortifying himself boldly against the attack from an entirely different quarter, he had considerably disconcerted the old gentleman, who had at once shifted his ground and retreated in good order. There was an encircling mystery, not without some charm, which enticed and fascinated, while it tantalized. Through all Medhurst's moods ran the fibre of his proud, stubborn character and temperament; but he was powerfully moved, nevertheless. His thoughts shifted and alternated. He dreamed of standing alone in the garden with Cecil. Her hand was in his, her eyes raised; but at the same time he was saying to himself that it could not, should not, be. Yet baffled, driven back, defeated, the sweet, imperious yearning recoiled only to readvance on a new line. His own readiness to believe that he was capable only of a course purely honorable enabled him to coquet a little with the dangerous idea. Fanny Dalton had said he had only to stretch out his hand to the young girl and he might draw her to him; he seemed to know the look she would give him, — a look of complete surrender, that gladly pledged her life away. And all the time the troubled, passionate *andante* spoke to his very soul; it was a revelation of what his life might be, if what was sweetest, deepest, and holiest came to pass, leading him to an earthly paradise; it told him, too, of loss, pain, separation; it showed him

the abyss into which he should be flung if he allowed himself to be led to an earthly hell.

His thoughts wandered aimlessly about: he remembered everything. His father, of whom he rarely thought, suddenly came to his mind, lying on the pillow, dying, pressing his little son's hand and saying, "I should be afraid to leave you alone in the world, my dear, did I not feel that you loved truth and honor for their own sake." Medhurst wondered why he should all at once have remembered this. If he had hitherto loved truth and honor it must have been for their own sake, and apart from external inducements. He had never been bribed before to give them up. He sat upright; he seemed to have been asleep and dreaming. The music stopped momentarily; the day had declined; the air was cooler.

"Are you asleep?" called Rodney.

"Yes; and dreaming, — delicious nightmare dreams. I must go home."

"No; not yet."

They went on playing. Medhurst felt calmer, he thought. He saw the utter falsity and futility of any chimera which promised him happiness. He might be tempted; he was more liable to temptation than other men, because he had denied himself everything; but he knew his own power of resistance, and he liked to feel at times the giant dreams his imagination brought him. He was so conscious of the poverty of his own life, without ties, associations, or actual duties, every circumstance of which seemed to him accidental and trivial. He had rebelled so perpetually against his lonely, egoistic

existence, the spending of what poor powers he possessed upon his ignoble necessities. It had been borne in upon his mind so unceasingly, that, besides having no career, he had no affiliation with that great human brotherhood which endures, suffers, dies, for home, for country, for religion's sake. Yet he knew his own strength, and had experienced a fierce, if impotent, craving to be or do something in the state or world.

Great sobs of lamentation came from the violin inside; it was as if Rodney, too, felt the pressure of this immense world-sorrow. But no, Rodney had no such grief. A mere brilliant epicurean like him could find enough of enjoyment in life. This fresh, girlish being, simple, true, and tender, who loved himself, Medhurst felt was necessary to him. He felt for a moment absolutely free from any fetters of self-incrimination. He needed this impulse; he needed this divine source of joy and comfort. A cold-blooded creature a man must be who would think of scruples with such a glimpse of heaven before him.

At this moment Medhurst looked up. Cecil herself was advancing along the terrace. He had been thinking of her as a spur to his ambition, as a bribe to his energy. He knew in this instant that what he cared about was the rosy oval of this girlish face; the beautiful outlines of the shoulders and throat; the turn of her wrist and hand; the charm of her eyes and smile. He stood up and bowed as she ascended the steps, and she made a sweeping courtesy, and then stood looking at him with a little, tremulous air of interrogation. He felt her beauty, her patrician air, the very daintiness and perfection

of her fresh toilet, like lashes, which stung him to the quick. Not one of her beauties escaped his observation, and at each one he called himself names. He had been sitting here, dreaming about her, when he ought to have been fleeing from the temptress. She seemed to him dangerous; he did not blame her; she did not know what monster folly he was capable of. His love had come about without his will, but he could save himself from it. It was not as if he did not know that his love would ruin her if she accepted it; deepening her experiences into the same terrible realism of poverty and failure he was doomed to. He could save her from that, — he could save her from any foolish, girlish fancy which might be governing her. He need not torture himself with questions; he need not wonder what event might be coming to pass. Nothing should happen except that this pretty, tender, spoiled creature should be safe and happy.

He smiled at her as at a child half-frightened.

"Go into the library," said he. "Is not the music delightful? I am glad another hearer has come, for, as for me, I must go away."

He went away on the instant. She stood looking after him, her eyes filling with tears.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"FAIR RIVALS."

THERE had been three rehearsals of "Fair Rivals" before Mr. Stein, the New York manager, who was to put the dramatic company through the requisite training, made his appearance; that is to say, some thirteen people, to whom parts had been allotted, stood about the stage, going and coming with wrong exits and wrong entrances, getting into each other's way, and once or twice tripping each other up; advising everybody else, but listening to no advice themselves; arguing on every point, quibbling and debating, — everything except attending to their own particular duties. Three of the actors only had taken pains to commit their parts to memory, the others disdained such an ignominious necessity; they waited, they declared, to get the idea of the whole. These detached sentences were too meaningless; it was hardly worth their while to try to fix them upon their minds. Most of the minor actors were discontented; each one was inclined to feel that whereas a part like his own was in no way calculated to show off his peculiar gifts, that of another might in every way suit him, and give him a chance to shine. Arthur Snow was one of the chief malcontents; he had counted the speeches of each one, he affirmed,

and made the discovery that he had a third less to say than any one else in the play. Miss Winchester, also, had a grievance; there was nothing in her part, not even a chance for a becoming costume. She was not ambitious, she declared; she had not expected to be first lady; but yet there was a certain fairness to be observed, and the easy passing over of her claims, etc. The lovers exchanged these confidences with absolute reliance on mutual sympathy and comprehension, and Arthur had proposed that they should withdraw from the play and allow their neglected claims to be felt. Lilly, however, entertained no such idea; having wit enough to realize that their places could easily be filled, she preferred to remain and take her little revenge as the chance came. In fact, the private theatricals were progressing as all private theatricals progress, and those upon whose shoulders the chief burdens and responsibilities rested welcomed Mr. Stein's arrival as the harbinger of a joyful change.

Mr. Stein was a small man, with brilliant, roving black eyes, a head of black, bushy, curly hair, a querulous forehead, and an ironic smile. His usual voice was soft and silky, but on the least excitement it rose to a preternatural shrillness, which stimulated and goaded, or cowed like a sting of nettles. He had managed private theatricals before, and knew very well what were the faults, foibles, and pet vanities of amateurs. He liked to be called a severe artist; he aimed to establish the precedent of a despotic tyranny. He enjoyed having these fine ladies and gentlemen go down on their knees to him and implore that he should lower his standards to the

requirements of their feeble capacities. Afterwards it was easy enough to reinstate them in their self-belief, and assure them that, with proper cultivation, they were likely to show surprising powers. Mr. Stein devoted his first night to a study of Mr. Heriot's comedy, and in the morning declared his opinion that it was too amateurish a bit of work to succeed on any stage; that it was faultily constructed; was all dialogue, all situation; that the climax did not come in in the right place, and that there was throughout a sad deficiency of action.

"We will put action into it somehow," said Rodney. "We won't let it be dull. We will introduce a tight-rope performance, a *cancan*, in the third act."

After finally accepting the play Mr. Stein surveyed the stage and scenery, and reviewed his corps of supernumeraries, property-men, scene-shifters, which consisted of John, Heriot's own man, and Thomas, from the stables. The manager declared that this arrangement and the other must be changed, and suggested the mode. He chalked the floor; he gave orders; he made his subordinates tremble. Then he took his own seat in the front centre of the stage, and in a faint voice declared himself ready. It was eleven o'clock, and the young people were waiting in the library, laughing, chatting, and flirting, little knowing what sort of an ordeal was in store for them.

They were admitted to the gallery, and Mr. Stein scanned them with a leisurely air, deciding, by an infallible instinct, who was and who was not to give him trouble.

"We will begin the rehearsal, if you please, ladies and gentlemen," he said, in his sweetest voice. "First, I will call the roll."

Every one answered except Medhurst, whose part, Rodney Heriot observed, he was to read that morning.

Mr. Stein now dismissed them all to the rear of the stage. He wanted no audience, he declared; no one for an on-looker save himself. Not a soul was to be admitted to the auditorium. This announcement was made with some violence and a wrathful eye, which was not reassuring. The first act was opened with Alec Haxtoun and Miss Winchester: Alec, in shooting-dress, with a gun and a bag, encountering the young girl, a dependant of Mrs. Chalcote's, just as she was leaving the house of her patroness.

Neither of them knew the part, but each contrived to hobble over the first few sentences in a great fright, when Mr. Stein's voice was heard.

"It is too rapid," he cried. "It is not audible. I beg you to remember, madam (this to Miss Winchester), that you are out-of-doors. It is an autumn afternoon. You are not a lady; you are not a soubrette. You have a position which necessitates seriousness, self-repression, humility. You must guard your eye, your tone, your manner. It is not a character in which you can sing high, — your tone must be low."

Lilly had carried so far into her part a self-sufficient air, a tone which sounded pert, and a characteristic little pose of the head which was distinctly out of the question. Alec was next found fault

with: he, too, must remember that he was out-of-doors; he had had a day's sport, was supposed to be tired, — he must lounge a little. In questioning the girl he must show at once the indifferent ease of a man of the world, and the stimulus of a personal idea. The scene began again, but began worse than before. Mr. Stein threw up his eyes and his hands, then resigned himself to the worst, and allowed them to go on, occasionally, however, ejaculating in a high key: —

"Not that way, madam. Cross in front. For God's sake, sir, allow me to hear you sufficiently to know whether you are following the text. The other side! the other side! Don't you see that you ought to be left centre? Ah, that will do, — that will do very well!"

Mr. Stein began to believe that he was going to have a very bad time indeed. Arthur Snow came on presently, and became at once his special abhorrence, and promised to be his worst plague. In fact, the act opened so badly that it needed swift and efficient help not to instantly shipwreck everybody's interest, hope, and belief. But, at last, Mrs. Dalton and Cecil came on together, and the manager's views changed at once. Adela Chalcote (Fanny Dalton) had just welcomed her young cousin as a guest at her country-house, and finding her bright, animated, and, above all, devoid of any real knowledge of the world, was explaining to her her present position and dilemma. Adela, being a rich young widow, had a score of lovers, and her house, although comparatively inacessible, was their constant resort. If they walked, if they drove, if they

shot, hunted, or yachted, it was all the same; they were sure to turn up during the day to ask about her health, to tell her the news, to answer an invitation, bring a book or a bunch of flowers. This had all been very pleasant so long as she had no other distraction; but at present she longed for a quiet interval. She wanted to meet an old friend, who was coming into the neighborhood to seek her out, — a friend, too, who would dislike the idea of her being the centre of attraction for other men; who was jealous, sensitive, suspicious, with more than Cæsar's nicety about women. Then Adela proposed that Nathalie should for the time engross her army of lovers, and give her time for conversations, sentiment, perhaps, indeed, romance.

Cecil had not far to go to find the idea she was to carry out, and apparently did her part to perfection. She possessed the advantage of a clear, deliberate, and flexible voice, and an incessant archness, and she knew every word by heart. Mrs. Dalton, however, astonished the manager. His first experience had been of dull, blind, plodding worms. Cecil was a chrysalis, — she might unfold into a winged creature; but here was the perfected butterfly. Mrs. Dalton's was not a star part; hers was not the despotism of a single figure, around which the others grouped, and which made triumph easy to her. She made the stage her own at once with an ease, a gayety, an absolute naturalness.

"Very good!" Mr. Stein put in, in a tranquillizing manner. "Excellent! Perfect! Don't forget the step. Not quite so much to the front. There, there, that is better. That is the very thing."

But, reinstated in his ideals by this delightful interlude, he was ready to fall upon the other actors with still more fury as the play proceeded. He bounded out of his chair, rushed into the scene, disorganizing and rearranging everybody and everything. His voice grew shriller and shriller; it piped above every other like a piccolo. He declaimed at everybody for being wooden, lifeless, — mere dull clods. He himself took each part, one after the other; he sank languishing upon a sofa, and received a proposal; he knelt at his own feet, and made a declaration to himself; accepted himself, — as it were, caught himself to his own heart.

The rehearsal lasted four hours, and Mr. Stein was still far from being satisfied, and begged that the third act might be gone over once more, "just to fix the positions in their minds." But the actors were worn out. They began to understand that the road to histrionic honors lay through no beds of musk or asphodel, and that no amaranthine bowers invited them to repose. Mr. Stein was far, however, from dismissing them in an abject and hopeless state of mind. He took pains to rekindle their hopes, and, if he had destroyed their illusions, substituted a clear ideal in its place. He had not spared Rodney Heriot; at first he had shown some faltering, some sign of mercy; but when he hesitated Rodney said: —

"You stand over me like Abraham over his son Isaac. Don't allow anything to interpose, — make the sacrifice!"

Medhurst came in on the second day. It was his fate to experience many abrupt alternations,

but none of them brought such a complete *bouleversement* of his habits as these rehearsals. His part, Colonel Campbell, was almost the only serious one in the play. He carried weight; he was earnest, he was romantic; he was, in fact, a little dull. But that was a point in his favor, so far as the difficulties were concerned. He knew his part, and it was sufficient to go through with it. Mr. Stein said, "Very good! very good!" in a tone which showed the unimportance of it all. He took the stage easily, and his exits and entrances left nothing to be desired. The idea of the play was to keep him in ignorance of the mad pranks which were going on. Mrs. Chalcote had made up her mind that it was worth while to marry Colonel Campbell, and to effect this required a vast amount of propriety. Nathalie (Cecil) assumed the responsibility of all the widow's flirtations, and effected this with irresistible charm and imperiously high spirits. Rodney was Cecil's lover, and carried into his part an alert intelligence and some humor, infusing much quaintness, querulousness, and poignancy into his personality. After the first three rehearsals were over, the play made progress. The minor characters began to know their parts and their places. The hopeful ones had learned how to improve, and the hopeless had grown callous to all Mr. Stein's objurgations, entreaties, and sarcasms. The chief of these was Arthur Snow, who was, to tell the truth, fortified against the manager's attacks by having his mind occupied with quite a different matter. He had decided that

it was a trivial success for a man of intellect to take a part well, and, having dismissed that ambition, he had all the more time to give to his grievances. Of these he had many, but chief among them was his grievance against Medhurst for upsetting him in the grapery, a fortnight before. It had required all Lilly's persuasions to keep him silent regarding this. Every man has his sensitive point, and Arthur drew the line where his physical dignity and uprightness were concerned. It was difficult, without bitterness of feeling, even some vindictiveness, to pass the secretary in the house, or on the grounds; and Medhurst had gradually become aware that Miss Winchester's lover avoided him, scowled at him from corners, averted his eyes if they were forced to encounter, and absolutely refrained from any spoken word. Medhurst was, however, so far from feeling any pangs of conscience where Arthur was concerned, that he merely supposed these signs to be the outflow of the young man's natural disagreeableness, and never thought of imputing to them any personal meaning. He thought it unfortunate that in the play some cutting and severe speeches were assigned him, towards this saturnine-looking individual, who had been his military subordinate, and he let them drop as indifferently as possible, until Mr. Stein expostulated.

"Is that the way to call a man a pryer, a listener, a beggarly rascal?" said he.

CHAPTER XIX.

RODNEY COMMITS HIMSELF TO FORTUNE.

RODNEY HERIOT was in the habit of wishing aloud in these days that he was a practical man; that his mind busied itself less with ideals and abstractions. He had always been delicate and fastidious, and liked better two small glasses of wine than one full bumper. A practical man, he knew, would fill his goblet to the brim to begin with, and end any possible uncertainty about his chance of having a second. It seemed to him the proper course when a man is making love to a young girl, not to be impatient and clamorous with his intentions and expectations, but to familiarize her mind with the idea that they are pleasant and desirable, and that by the mere process of evolution she will, in time, develop into his affianced wife. A practical man, he knew, would be a little brutal; would insist upon her having a surprise, a sensation, perhaps a shock; would feel a distinct assurance that the precious creature belonged to him, and that he must enforce his claims. The empire of woman is attained by force. Rodney thought the play was going to help him; but, although he was Cecil's lover there, and her successful lover, too, the situation gave him no advantages. He found himself, on the contrary, adhering strictly to the common-

place after going through his part with its fanciful and high-flown phrases. It was, in fact, a difficult matter for Rodney to break the charm of his new acquaintance with Cecil; he would have preferred to keep it there for a time, but he began to feel hurried. Mrs. Dalton had of late invaded his thoughts, and her influence was one which disturbed, unsettled, and made him uneasy. They had played at a sort of love-making so long, he had not, at first, found anything new in the tones, glances, and words she gave him. He had thought it a very pretty arrangement when Medhurst turned out to be Fanny's old lover. It cleared his mind of any suspicion that he needed to regard the young man as a rival where Cecil was concerned. But nowadays Fanny frequently suggested that Medhurst and Cecil were more than friends. Rodney was not given to receiving with over-credulity any word of Fanny's, and this he did not accept. Still he was moved; his will was excited, and he resolved to do something, to say something, he knew not what, but something which should fix and retain Cecil.

The play was to come off on the twelfth of August, and on the eleventh, just for a respite, to give a chance to take breath before a final rehearsal, Rodney proposed a little picnic. He declared that he felt an inclination to rough it; that he was tired of eating from a table, and wanted to take his dinner from a rock; to drink out of a bottle; to wear knickerbockers, and be picturesque.

This was what he told Mrs. Haxtoun when he went over to invite the household. They would

start at noon, he said, and drive thirteen miles, to the Devil's Glen, and then they would eat acorns and berries, and carry out all the details of an Arcadian existence through the afternoon, returning at dusk, with the full moon rising in the east.

Mrs. Haxtoun declared the idea to be charming. And were they all to go?

"Certainly," said Rodney. "Mr. and Mrs. Haxtoun, Cecil, Alec, Miss Winchester, Mr. Snow, and the secretary, Medhurst."

"Mr. Medhurst is so very particularly busy," said Mrs. Haxtoun. "Besides, he" — She waited to have Rodney take her idea, but he merely looked at her inquiringly, and she was obliged to finish. "He never seems to fit into our grooves," she added.

"Doesn't he?" asked Rodney. "He does not waste himself, I admit; but I like him. I will ask him to come, if you have no objection."

"Oh, none in the world!" said Mrs. Haxtoun. "Besides, Mrs. Dalton and he are"—

"Are they?" asked Rodney, eagerly.

"So he told Mr. Haxtoun," said poor Mrs. Haxtoun, who still had doubts, in spite of the brilliant illumination with which her husband had finally cleared up all mysteries.

"Do you know why I am getting up this picnic?" asked Rodney, with a look of mischief.

"You are always doing everything that is most kind."

"I want to speak to Cecil," said Rodney, in a very soft voice, and with the look of a frightened little boy making some terrible secret audible.

Mrs. Haxtoun looked as much fluttered as if he were making love to her.

"Speak to Cecil?" she repeated, as if puzzled.

"Don't you know what I mean? You must have seen," said Rodney, with some impatience. "Surely you must understand that, if I can, I want to marry Miss Haxtoun."

"You do her very great honor."

"Don't say that. I am afraid you mean that I have a good deal to offer her. I should not be satisfied if she took me in that way."

Rodney looked singularly disturbed. His pale face was flushed and his eyes sparkled. "It means a great deal to me," he said, turning his eyes away. "By the time a man is as old as I am he has tested so many things, and been disappointed so many times. I could not bear to be disappointed in my wife."

"Cecil is very young," said Mrs. Haxtoun, in an even, placid manner. "I think the man she married would find her sweet, docile, eager to please him. She is spirited, but"—

Rodney was not listening.

"I never offered myself to any woman before," said he. "It does not spring from cowardice that I shrink a little. What would you say if I were to ask you to tell Cecil what I have said? Then, if she will go to the picnic to-morrow"— He paused; he grew pale. "On my word," said he, "I don't know what I should do if I were to see she had not come."

Mrs. Haxtoun looked down at her two pretty, capable hands, crossed on her lap.

"I think she is almost certain to go," she observed quietly.

Rodney's face cleared. "Then," said he, "I will walk up to her at the glen and say, 'Miss Haxtoun, will you climb to the top of the cliff with me?'"

Mrs. Haxtoun could not help laughing slightly. There was something almost infantile in Rodney's face and words. A child could not have spoken more simply and gleefully.

"And you will let her go to the top of the cliff with me?" he asked, laughing with her.

"Yes, under the circumstances."

"But sometimes you have shaken your head, and built barricades against me."

She looked at him indulgently. She liked her future son-in-law very much. She liked, too, the way he was putting his offer before Cecil, — so much better than blurting it out and embarrassing a girl, almost revolting her. Rodney kissed her hand, and went into the study to give his invitation to Medhurst, who was copying manuscript.

"You are coming to my picnic to-morrow, at twelve o'clock," Rodney began at once. "How would you like best to go? In a carriage with Mr. and Mrs. Haxtoun, or"—

"I can't go at all," said Medhurst. "A picnic! Good heavens! what are you thinking of? It was bad enough for me to accept a part in the play. I lie awake nights, and reflect what a fool I was to mix myself up in such matters!"

"Naturally, spending all your time on an immortal work of genius, you think more of posterity than of this fleeting temporal generation. But forget

posterity for once. Come and have a cheerful afternoon."

"I can't go."

"I insist upon it."

"Don't. I am out of humor with myself and with all the world. I am in no mood for picnics. I am in no mood for anything save getting away from here."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"Yes."

Rodney looked the other over. Medhurst certainly wore the air of a man ill at ease. "I wish I might do something for you," said he.

"You can't. We have to look after ourselves, — eat for ourselves, digest for ourselves, sleep for ourselves, act and walk for ourselves. Above all, we have to settle the question of nerves and brains for ourselves."

"It is a question of nerves and brain, is it?"

"Don't talk to me, Heriot," cried Medhurst. "Go away and enjoy yourself. I don't begrudge you your good luck. I like to think there is a man to whom everything comes, — freedom from sordid needs and cares; whose independence is not crushed out of him by his being compelled to bend double under the burden of making his own living; who is not domineered over by narrow intellects, and who need not refuse anything ideal, anything beautiful, worthy, true, satisfactory, as a temptation of the devil."

Rodney looked confounded.

"Has anything happened?" he asked.

Medhurst laughed. "Excuse my petulance. I am angry and out of sorts. I had no right to vent

my rage upon you, however. I have tried to give myself up to this life for a time, but I see the impossibility of it."

Rodney had entertained the idea of sitting down for an hour with Medhurst, and telling him what his intentions were regarding Miss Haxtoun. Considering that he had felt some twinges of jealousy about Medhurst this might seem inconsistent. But those impressions were lost sight of at present. He was in a joyous mood, and he wanted to talk over his many-tinted feelings, classify and analyze them, and from Medhurst alone he felt sure of comprehension. Rodney, however, was no egotist, and he saw that the young fellow had some trouble of his own which at present blurred the world for him. His face showed restlessness, impatience, some anger, but, above all, a hopeless despondency.

"You would rather have me go away now?" said Rodney.

"Yes. After that confounded play is over I will pay you a visit, and tell you where I stand; for by that time I hope to have made up my mind."

"And you will not come to my picnic?"

"Thank you; no. If they are all away I shall rejoice to be left alone in this silent house."

The next morning was as fine as Rodney could desire. He slept but little through the night, and that by snatches. He watched the day dawn, having flung his shutters wide open, and, lying on his bed, he could see the flush in the north-east, the purple shadows withdrawing and leaving only a gauzy veil inwoven with flame along the horizon. He felt the peace and beauty of the sunrise like a bene-

diction. The sun was not yet above the tree-tops when he left the house. He crossed the lawn to the stables, and unchained the two dogs, — Max, the Siberian bloodhound, and Duke, the Gordon setter, — who fawned about him frantic with joy. Rodney liked their gambols. Max could wear the dignity of a dog on canvas; but Duke was hardly past his puppyhood, and was the most beguiling of companions, luring the old hound into many an unseemly prank. They chased each other; they went through mimic battles; they rolled over and over in a close embrace, pretending to bite and snarl and chew each other, Max occasionally escaping from the game, and resuming his majesty with a glance at his master which explained the reason of his condescension to the volatile Duke. Rodney walked through the woods to the meadows, where the spider-webs were stretched over the crest of the grasses, and their weft, wet with the dew, sparkled like a jewel-casket.

"That is the sign of a fair day," said Rodney to himself.

The meadow was a pasturage, and, while he was climbing the side of the hill at whose top the woods began again, a cow-boy let down the bars and a drove of cows came winding leisurely in, — beautiful, sleek, soft-faced Alderneys, and two pretty Jersey heifers, who began a wild riot at the sight of the clover, and ran towards it in mad haste. The dogs resented this intrusion, and set up a furious barking, and it was all Rodney could do to call them off.

"Be quiet, be quiet, I say!" he cried, and brandished an imaginary weapon.

He had reached the brow of the hill, and strode

forward, hastily driving the dogs before him, into the thick grove of oaks and chestnuts, carpeted with dark, thin, green grass, and thick, deep moss thickly strewn with acorn windfalls.

Something moving caught the dogs' eyes and Rodney's simultaneously, and in a second more, at a bound, a squirrel was far up the trunk of a chestnut, and among the branches could look safely down and laugh at the despair of the setter, whose blood was on fire in his veins. In another moment both animals dashed furiously into the ferns and underbrush; a rustling noise came to Rodney's ears, a cry was heard, and there was a great flapping of wings, as some ground-birds flew to the top of a bush.

"Come here, you rascal! Come here, I say!" cried Rodney. "What mischief are you up to? Come here, I say!"

There was no mistaking his tone, and both dogs sneaked out of the thicket, Duke with something in his mouth,— something soft, fluffy, palpitating, the sight of which turned Rodney absolutely sick with pain. It was a young pheasant, and he took it from the setter and held it in his hand. It made no effort to escape; it lay quite helpless, giving now and then a convulsive twitch; its eyes were closed. He hoped it had merely swooned from fright, and he waited, believing it might revive. He would have given much to see it fly away.

"If I had stayed at home this creature would have been alive still," he said to himself, with a profound sensation of sorrow and remorse. He did not blame Duke; he blamed only himself.

He sought out a little mossy nook at the foot of a half-dead oak, and laid the bird there. He felt as if the pitiful sight of the rumpled feathers would haunt him evermore. The dogs understood his sombre mood, and eyed their victim with contrition, slinking after him close to his heels as he went a little deeper into the wood and washed his hands at the spring.

"I am just such an animal as they are," he said to himself. His blithe mood was over. When he came out a new world had seemed opening to him. Now, he felt that he was an accursed egotist, who asked too much; he had no right to go on satisfying himself in this selfish way.

But by the time noon came, and the picknicing party was setting out, he had regained some sort of equipoise.

CHAPTER XX.

A PICNIC.

MRS. ESTÉ was to take Mr. Haxtoun and Cecil to the picnic in the landau, while Mrs. Haxtoun, Alec, and Mrs. Dalton were to go in the barouche. Arthur Snow was to drive Miss Winchester in the pony carriage, and Rodney was to have an old friend, named Edmunds, with him in the T-cart. But Rodney told Edmunds to drive on, and he accompanied his mother to the Haxtouns' and waited for the party to assemble there.

The family seemed to be gathered on the veranda, but Cecil was not among them. No one would have known exactly how much the girl's absence meant to Rodney when he asked her mother where she was.

"She is coming," Mrs. Haxtoun replied, impassively, and without meeting Rodney's eyes. She went in, and presently reappeared with her daughter, who looked serious, pale, and rather haughty. She gave a comprehensive little nod, but did not once glance towards Rodney, who acknowledged her presence with a deep salam.

"May I put you in the carriage?" he asked, and took her hand in his and led her down the steps, and only resigned her when she was seated beside his mother. Mr. Haxtoun followed, well burdened with plaids, water-proofs, overshoes, and umbrellas.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Esté, with her little shriek. "Do you suppose we are likely to get drenched? Shakespeare says, 'When clouds are seen, wise men put on their cloaks'; but we can have the carriage-top put up."

"The weather indications are for showers and falling barometer," said Mr. Haxtoun; "and it seems better to play a prudent part. Besides, if we sit on the ground, we shall want water-proofs."

"Don't ask me to put my old bones in jeopardy. I like to go on a picnic once a year, to refresh my memory of what a horrid bore it is. I should have declined this, but I hate to leave off doing things. One gets so narrowed down and limited by the years, one should only give up what one is compelled to."

While Mr. Haxtoun was settling himself and his belongings, Rodney, on the other side, leaned his arm on the door, and gazed into Cecil's face. His head was so near hers one might have thought he said something in an inaudible voice, but he could not have spoken to save his life. She, on her side, gazed back at him as if both terrified and fascinated.

"Are you coming, Rodney?" asked Mrs. Esté, "or shall Peter drive on?"

Rodney wrenched himself away, raised his hat, and walked down the avenue, meeting the T-cart on the road. He jumped in, took the reins from Edmunds, and headed the party, distancing them by a mile or more the first quarter of an hour. It was easy for Edmunds to see that Heriot was burning a good deal of fuel to-day; but he did not, with

intrusive curiosity, seek to discover where it all came from. Rodney was evidently furiously in earnest about something. The guest asked occasional questions about the country through which they were passing, and was answered clearly and definitely enough. They reached the glen almost three-quarters of an hour before the rest of the party, and Rodney occupied himself in sending the servants, who were already getting out the cold lunch, hither and thither. He chose a place for the wine-cellar, and showed them how to lay the ice.

They had brought half-a-dozen steamer-chairs, which were placed on a rug, and preparations for everybody's comfort were being made in an exact and substantial way, which showed what advantages could be wrested from a situation habitually associated with discomfort.

"This is not so bad, you see, Mr. Haxtoun," Mrs. Esté said to him when the party arrived. "You can have your feet on a Turkey rug, and your body on a cushioned seat; and under these circumstances one may give one's self up to enjoyment. Just look at the tops of the trees against the sky! See the sunlight flickering through that dome of green! Oh, how lovely nature is! Why should not one always live here among trees and moss?"

"Damp! damp!" returned Mr. Haxtoun, gloomily. He had put on his rubber shoes, and was now arranging a shawl over his shoulders. "Do you happen to know," he asked, in a preternatural sort of voice, "what there is to be for lunch?"

"Salads, *mayonnaise*, and cold pies," said Mrs. Esté.

He shuddered. "I don't know why I came," he said plaintively. "Mrs. Haxtoun made a point of it; if the results of this picnic are that she is left a widow I am not sure but that she ought to be answerable for it."

"You shall have some of my nice, hot, nourishing *bouillon*," said Mrs. Esté, soothingly. "They have got a little silver apparatus to heat it with, and can give it to me just as I have it at home."

The place had a good deal of character and charm. On the south rose a high wall of rock, which seemed, towards the top, to have been smoothed with a chisel, it was so polished and so bare; below, it was broken; the massive blocks were piled on one another in confusion, and in the wide crevices was a perfect luxuriance of vegetation, — hemlocks, pines, dwarfed maples, and laurels. Many of the trees seemed to cling to the sheer rock, and had only half saved themselves from being carried away by the spring torrents. At the foot of the cliff a noisy stream rushed along, now babbling over shallows, again sleeping in pools which overflowed into cascades.

The young people declared the gorge charming, and found rare preciousness in the glimpses of the far-off sky, against which the tassels of the pines moved perpetually. Alec devoted himself to Mrs. Dalton, Edmunds took Cecil, and Arthur and Lilly wandered about as usual, coupled and inseparable. Mrs. Dalton amused herself with Alec, and put him through a course of training which she thought calculated to do him good. She did not allow herself to be too easily pleased. Nobody

else was ready to suffer martyrdom for her sake at present, and Alec's prodigality of self-sacrifice ought not to be wasted. She asked for some laurel-leaves, and he climbed half-way up the cliff to get the glossiest for her. She saw a remarkable-looking stone at the bottom of the brook, and, when she insisted, it was disembedded at some risk, for the water was so clear it gave no idea of its actual depth. Alec had put on his prettiest summer clothes, and, as may be imagined, these labors were quite unsuited to the delicate lavender of the trousers. But he dared not think of the results, with the widow's half-satirical, half-sweetly expectant gaze upon him. His soul burned within him with envy to see Rodney Heriot in dark-blue knicker-bockers, easy, untrammelled, and particularly handsome.

"I say," said he to Arthur Snow, when he had a moment of opportunity, just before lunch, "why couldn't you and I have had the sense to come properly dressed? I've smeared my knees with clay, and stained them green besides. And I heard a stitch give way, by Jove, I did! I wish you would look and see if it is all right."

"How can I look?" asked Arthur. "Mrs. Dalton is staring straight at me."

"She isn't looking at you; she is looking at me."

"I tell you she is looking straight at me."

"Never mind, go on. It isn't as if it were Lilly."

"Lilly wouldn't stare us out of countenance," said Arthur, in a tone of indignation. "But no matter. I think the seams are strained; but if you are prudent" —

Alec groaned within himself, with a lively wish which contained no ingredient of expectation that Mrs. Dalton might be prudent. He was too much enamored at present to be able to look out for his own preservation. He was not master of his acts; she dictated them. Besides, as all men know, fair Cunigunde, sending her lover into the lion's jaws to pick up her glove, is the model of every woman on a pleasure-excursion.

By this time Mr. Haxtoun and Mrs. Esté were drinking *bouillon*, to keep off the chill, while Mrs. Haxtoun sought, with the finest tact and spirit, to persuade them that the day was charming, the warmth genial, and the moss dry as a Persian rug which has six times crossed the desert. Mrs. Esté had at first been a little carried away by the romantic charm of the glen, — she was always ready to kindle at romance, — but Mr. Haxtoun had depressed her. She began to think about dampness and malaria; she analyzed her sensations, to discover whether they were normal; she had the tiger-skin brought for her feet; she questioned her son as to what time he thought they might get home.

Mrs. Haxtoun had gone the road to pleasure before like a convict with a weight chained to his leg, and did not relax her efforts to pique, interest, and rouse her husband. She had come to the picnic with a purpose, and intended that the purpose should be carried out. She selected all the nicest bits of the luncheon for the old gentleman without thought of the possible consequences, and when he demurred said: —

"Oh, in this fresh, delicious air, with this healthy

resinous odor coming from the evergreens, you can eat anything, my dear."

Mr. Haxtoun began mildly to be cheered. He took some old Madeira, of strange potency, and promised soon to be a little inebriated.

"Tell Mrs. Esté about your great discovery of a new epic, dearest Leonard," now suggested the indefatigable wife.

"Not a new epic. What can you mean? A new idea in the epic, which even Max Müller has overlooked," said Mr. Haxtoun. The subject was dear to him, and comparatively new; he thought about it constantly, with ever fresh amplifications.

Mrs. Esté gave a little shriek of delight to think of a delightful new idea, and nestled among her wraps to assume the best attitude of attention, with a look at the old gentleman as if she were breathless with interest and admiration. He began to expound at once, with unmixed, unchecked delight at his opportunity, and she tried to keep up with him. She plied her parasol, her fan, her *vinaigrette;* she pinched herself, she shook herself, she gave little screams. Mr. Haxtoun meantime revolved round his subject with large, fluent, and impressive sentences. Its vagueness, magnitude, remoteness, just suited him; there was no necessity for fixed conclusions, because there was no possibility of attaining any; talking about it was like pouring water into empty sieves, rolling a stone up-hill, and then down again. Mrs. Esté's exclamations grew fainter and fainter, — they ceased entirely: she slept. Mr. Haxtoun, nevertheless, neither paused nor slackened, — he had his subject, and that was

enough. By a judicious "Indeed," "Exactly, I see the force of your remarks," at intervals, Mrs. Haxtoun kept him rushing on with a steady stream.

Cecil had sat very quietly under the trees with Lilly Winchester. Now and then Rodney Heriot had gone up to her, but he had scarcely broken the silence which had fallen between them. When the luncheon was over he said, "Will you go to the top of the cliff with me?" and watched the little trembling of her lips and the drop of her eyelids as she rose. He did not look at her, nor she at him. He did not speak to her. They went down the glen, along the side of the bank, until they reached the stepping-stones, and then he took her hand to help her across, and did not again let it go. They climbed the first ledge thus, hand in hand.

"Are you tired?" Rodney asked, looking into her face.

She seemed a little breathless. She was pale, and her eyes had the large, serious gaze of an awed child.

She shook her head.

"I want to do just what you would wish to do," said he.

He was deeply stirred as he thus gazed at her. His eyes were blinded with tears, his lips trembled. "*My dear — my dearest — my precious little one!*" said he, the words coming from him as if pressed forth by some force stronger than himself. "I want to be so good to you," he continued, with an odd half-laugh. "May I fall on the ground, and kiss your feet?"

"Let us go on," she said, in a dull, monotonous voice, quite unlike her own.

They went on. The path was narrow, and they could not walk abreast, but he would not release her hand. His emotion scared him, and he began to jest and talk fantastically. He found out an echo and called to it; he sang little snatches of songs. A stone was in the way, and with the point of his boot he threw it from the path, and it went thundering down the precipice. He pretended to be in horror lest it should fall on somebody's head; he pictured possible catastrophes; he found himself culpable of matricide or fratricide.

"For your father is my father now, is he not?" he asked, putting his face close to Cecil's, with the intonation of a mischievous little boy.

But no sign on that immovable, pale face answered his light words.

He fell into silence again, and looked at Cecil. She wore a suit of dark red, a wide-brimmed black hat with red plumes. His eyes fixed insatiably upon the clear, pure profile; he had never felt loveliness before. He knew not what of all that was in his heart he dared utter aloud. He was afraid of frightening her. To his generosity, to his magnanimity, he said to himself, there must be no bounds. He must not talk of love to her; only of what would neither terrify, flutter, nor embarrass her. Still, he wanted one little word, one little sign; it was not enough that she had come to-day, had let him bring her to the top of the cliff; he must have just one little token of consent, of surrender.

They were, by this time, on the heights, and could look down upon the vast sea of foliage, — oak trees, chestnuts, maples, rich in leaf, with their brilliant and luminous tints against the darker, duller green of the resinous trees ; they could hear the glad music of the brook among the boulders far below, but could not gain a glimpse of it. Here, at the top of the cliff, a few old oaks and cedars, overrun with creepers, whose bunches of leaves hung like festive garlands, kept off the heat of the sun, and the air was fresher than at the bottom of the ravine. Not a living creature seemed near; not even a bird's song broke the silence.

"Cecil," muttered Rodney, at last, dropping her hand, "will you not look at me?"

He was flushed with excitement, she was pale as death. She seemed under the constraint of some imprisoning consciousness which she could not shake off.

"Cecil," he cried, "oh, for God's sake, speak to me!"

But she did not answer. Her breath came in quick, short gasps. Rodney stood for a moment waiting for her reply, then half-fell, half-flung himself on the ground at her feet, and so looked up into her face.

"If you won't take me, Cecil," said he, "let me fling myself over the rocks. I cannot live without you."

"What shall I say?" she asked, with a visible shudder, but with the blood rushing to her cheeks.

He caught her hand and kissed it on the palm.

"Don't say anything," he answered. "This is enough. It is enough that you are here with me.

Only tell me one thing, — you are going to try to love me?"

She looked down at him now with a definite, intent glance. "I promised mamma," she said, in a low, clear voice.

"That you would try to love me?"

"Yes."

He looked up at her, absolutely ravished with happiness. He was not certain but that he liked this mystery, this sweet uncertainty, better than the full revelation; for how could he have borne that? To have been free to take her in his arms, to clasp her to his breast, would have been too much.

"You believe in me, — you trust me, do you not?" he asked, tremulously.

"I do not feel that I know you yet."

Their eyes met, — his showed an unusual brilliancy of glance, a vivacity and strength beyond her experience of him, while hers were timid and rather sad. There was no spontaneity about her, and, although she had shown agitation, it was not in answer to his, but the result of some poignant feeling of her own.

"Mamma says," she now went on, "that it is a great honor — a great chance for me — to become your wife; that nothing in the world could content her so well."

He lost color a little. He rose.

"Come and sit down on this log," said he. "Do you know, I rode over here yesterday, and looked at this place? I wanted a seat here, and I dragged this trunk from the foot of those locust-trees. I

thought to myself then, 'Perhaps Cecil will sit here with me.'"

He looked into her face and laughed.

"My wish is coming to pass."

He led her to the log, and she sat down. He flung himself on the grass before her at full length.

"At your feet," said he. "Perhaps some day you will say, 'Friend, come up higher.'"

There was irresistible whim in his voice, and his eyes lit with some amusement.

"Did your mother tell you I loved you very much?" he now asked.

She shook her head.

"I do," said he, in a delightful voice. "I think of you all the time. The first night I ever saw you I fell in love. You were perpetually yawning, and I fancy that was what bewitched me."

She smiled a little, — she could not help it.

"You are so grudging and so chary," he went on, "that I have little else to tell. If you have not yawned you have snubbed me, you have eluded me, you have laughed at me; but I have gone on loving you. I did not realize it at first, or I should have run away. I'm afraid of this feeling; it is stronger than myself."

They looked at each other, tremulously and seriously.

"I know what it all means," he said, presently. "I used to think life had nothing equal to our dreams. For years I went on trying everything, consuming myself in vain regrets that I could find nothing. But now" —

He wrenched himself away from the grasp of his

passion. "I'll be good to you," he began again swiftly. "I have been a brute sometimes, but — I will be very good to you. That is what I am all the time thinking about. I keep you close at my side. I fancy you are cold, and I wrap you in soft, warm things. I say to you, 'What would you like, my little one? Where will you go?' Perhaps it is a twilight walk you will be taking, and we set off, you on my arm, — not here, but in some beautiful part of the Old World where I have been before, all alone, — where I have longed for you. Perhaps we go upon the water in some tranquil bay, with lovely shores and high wooded hills, where the waters are golden, and the oars take the sunset light, as they come up dripping. Or we are in cities, and we drive about in great glee; we order dinners at *cafés;* that is, I order them for you. I say to you, 'My little wife, I will give you such a meal as you never ate before in your life,' and I write out the *menu* while you sit and wait. Then you hate the strange, savory, but too complex dishes, and I tell you, 'You shall live on biscuit and cream, — a baby's diet best suits a little girl like you.'" He laughed irresistibly. "You will see all the pictures too, — I will teach you how to look at pictures. And you shall climb the Alps, very carefully; but you are young and strong, and you ought to do it once. But we are not always going about, — we sit by the fire together; you have on such pretty little slippers; your feet are cold; you" — He broke off; he laughed, but his eyes were shining. "Oh, what a wonder you will make of the world for me!" he said, very low under his breath, and stopped short,

his blood tingling with ecstasy at this new, strange expectation.

Cecil sat looking down at him seriously, with dilated eyes. "The sooner you fall in love with me the better!" he exclaimed, with some imperiousness. "I will be patient a little while; but then I shall be very impatient, — a very demon of impatience!"

While he said this some feeling rushed over her, drowning all her consciousness like a flood; her face sank on her breast, and she covered it with her hands.

In a moment he was leaning over her, — he had his arm about her. "I have said too much; forgive me, — forgive me," said he. "Tell me what it is."

She looked up at him with streaming eyes.

"I feel as if I ought not to listen," she said, between her sobs. "Your words mean so much to you, but to me they mean so little; they"—

"Don't mistrust me. Trust me absolutely. I will not be impatient; I did not intend to say that. Don't be worried about the future." Still looking at him her terror and her distrust vanished. "We won't be even engaged," he said; "that is, to have anybody know about it but your mother and ourselves, until you get used to the idea."

"You are very good to me," she faltered.

"Am I?" He looked at her long and steadily. "I want to be good to you," he said then; "for I want you to love me. I want you to love me with your whole heart. And I am not unworthy, — I swear to you I am not unworthy. I am swept and garnished for you. Nothing that does not belong

to you can enter in. O my little love! — my little love!"

He was still bending over her.

"My little love!" he said again, "I want to do something that shall content you. Shall I fling myself over the rocks there, and take myself out of your sight and thought forever?"

With a stinging sense of her own ingratitude she caught his hand in hers.

"Don't say such things!" she whispered.

The action delighted him; he lifted the little hand and kissed it. "And to think," he exclaimed, "that I may go to New York and buy a ring for this little hand!"

At this moment the scene was interrupted by one of the men who appeared at the top of the rocks, shrieking, volubly and shrilly, that all was packed up and the party ready to start; that a storm was at hand.

Brought back to his senses Rodney saw that great clouds had gathered; that the sun was blackly obscured; that the whole character of the day had changed. What had to be instantly done was to hurry Cecil down the zigzagging path, which, under the dense foliage, was almost as dark as night. The ravine seemed a very gulf of blackness. The wind roared through the trees, and when they could catch sight of the sky it showed great masses of vapor, merging, separating, driven asunder and apart. Only one carriage waited, and into that Rodney bundled Cecil, and, at the next instant, at one swoop the rain fell. He sat on the box all the way home, nevertheless. The rain seemed a glad thing to him.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SOIRÉE DRAMATIQUE.

THE next day rose fair enough; and *dies iræ* as it was for manager and actors, it needed to be fair. At the very sight of Mr. Stein, walking about the stage, rechalking all the lines for the furniture, the group of amateurs turned pale. He was, to begin with, at the white heat into which he usually worked himself by the end of the rehearsal, and those signs of exasperation boded ill to every one of them. He was not even pleased with Mrs. Dalton to-day; he disdained her remarks, and rejected, with a sort of fury, all her suggestions. The "leading lady" could afford to shrug her shoulders at the manager's ill-temper, but not so the lesser *dramatis personæ*. The rehearsal went badly. A last rehearsal is apt to go badly, but a good omen for the public performance is said to blossom out of a bad final rehearsal. Mr. Stein ignored, however, any pleasing predictions for the evening. Not one of the minor actors seemed to know his or her part; exits and entrances were all wrong. All spirit was flatly gone out of the play, and the whole thing dragged. Not even Mrs. Dalton and Rodney Heriot could infuse life into the piece. Cecil was languid and lifeless. Alec tripped constantly in his text,

overacted, lost his points, and showed a tendency to introduce "gags," which infuriated the manager. In fact, it was a stormy scene, and it was an experience to inspire despair. The acts, repeated over and over, stretched out endlessly; the actors went out by turns, when they had a moment off the stage, and drank coffee and ate sandwiches, then dispiritedly returned to the business of the hour. Innumerable questions arose concerning every scene, and everybody's legs and elbows. The play fairly bristled with difficulties, hitherto overlooked or postponed.

To Medhurst it was a long day. He had never forgiven himself for consenting to take a part, and his annoyance had grown with each succeeding experience of the play. He was never over-pliant to the requirements of a new situation. He had none of that easy strategy which allows a man to seize what he finds essential, and disembarrasses himself of what is trivial or annoying. His part was a dry one, although most of the plot of the play hung on the details of it. He was perpetually thrown into contact with Arthur Snow and Miss Winchester, who showed themselves to-day so imperfect in their *rôles* that the scenes had to be gone through over and over again. The mere reiteration was depressing and irritating enough, but Mr. Stein's temper made it unbearable. He shrieked, he screamed, he tore his hair, he stamped his feet. By following his directions one could gain no advantage; by rejecting them one was almost torn to pieces. For a time Medhurst supposed that he, as well as the others, was the object of these spirited invectives, and

infused as much correctness into his part as he was master of, although it seemed to be of no use. But presently Mr. Stein, perhaps by way of adding fresh bitterness to his fault-finding, made the *amende*, and offered his polite condolences for Medhurst's being compelled to suffer for the clumsy and stupid performance of the others.

This was unfortunate. Arthur Snow had grown each day more aggressive and more impertinent to Medhurst. At first the latter had received these manifestations as if they had been the general petty signs of life given by an unhappy and suffering cur; but he began to see that they were addressed to himself. Arthur Snow was evidently enraged with him, for some unknown cause; and, whatever might have lighted the fire, Medhurst could easily see that Mr. Stein's words added fresh fuel to it. The little fellow perpetually snarled; he swore under his breath; he scowled at Medhurst when he saw him in his way, and would not turn out. Nature had not made Medhurst very patient; but he bore this for the time. The play was Rodney Heriot's, and he would not complicate its difficulties by private quarrels. He continued to go through his part as if by mechanism; his face showed neither vexation, amusement, nor weariness. He seemed, perhaps, absent-minded; but his thoughts were not elsewhere, he was absolutely engrossed by the situation; he was all attention, — he lost nothing. He watched Mrs. Dalton, Heriot, and Miss Haxtoun. Fanny was fascinated with herself at present, and he discovered nothing in her save the tricks and niceties of her art.

Heriot was excited, and apparently in the seventh heaven of enjoyment; but Cecil drooped visibly. Medhurst began feverishly to wish that he was away. If there was any power, any pride, any manhood left in him, he longed to regather it. Clearly it was circumstance or fate, or it was the besotted blindness of others, which had made him love this girl; of his own accord he would never have dared think of her. But, in the first place, Rodney Heriot had set him on; then Mrs. Haxtoun's doubts, fears, prohibitions; Mr. Haxtoun's careful diplomacy; and, finally, Fanny Dalton's too clear picturing of what had hovered in the furthest confines of his imagination — a far-off fancy — had brought Cecil close before his eyes and heart; had driven him to watch her, to think of her, to dream about her. Ah, what dreams! Did he hope she loved him? He said to himself he would rather he were dead than hear her say she loved him. But then a man may say very strong things, which have no echo in the heart at all.

"To-morrow," Medhurst thought within himself, "to-morrow the play will be over. Then I will make up my mind what to do."

The curtain went up at nine o'clock that night, and the play began. The entire neighborhood of Philadelphia was represented by the audience, and the orchestra and supper were from New York. But, in spite of this brilliance, in spite of the costumes, the first scene dragged a little, and Arthur Snow and Lilly Winchester came off presently quite out of humor. Other people had applause, — not they; let them do what they would they were

met with fault-finding, peremptory accents, and suggestions for improvement. There were the others all radiant in the sunlight, with halos of superiority round their faces, — they, alas! stood in the shadow, rayless. Lilly, however, a little further on, was to taste the sweets of popularity: by a little toss of the head, a little *moue*, a little coquetry, which by no means belonged to her part, but showed the irresistible feminine instinct, she brought down the house. After this success Arthur sulked alone; he was jealous of Lilly, disgusted with all the world. It was almost a comfort to him that he had an absolute grievance against Medhurst, for the demon of quarrel had taken possession of him, and he was determined to vent it.

Meanwhile Fanny Dalton was having a great success; her imperious, brilliant personality made itself felt; she swayed the other actors, stirred their powers, and carried them along with her. Cecil woke up; she was *naïve*, charming; she was irresistible. When Fanny dazzled and surprised, she fascinated; when Fanny sparkled, she glowed. She showed lively sensations, original impressions, and, at the same time, a girlish dignity and modesty which won the heart. Everybody declared that Fanny Dalton was the most finished actress, but Cecil was more interesting. Cecil was called out again and again, and while she was bowing and carrying off her loads of bouquets, somebody remembered to cry, "Mrs. Chalcote! Mrs. Chalcote!"

Rodney went up to Cecil, behind the scenes, with a little grimace. "You are carrying off all the honors," said he. "Madame will be cross."

"It is very absurd," Cecil returned, "for them to applaud me. She acts a thousand — a million times better than I ever could."

"Of course she does."

"But my part is perhaps more pleasing."

"She did not think so. Yours has more *bonté*, and, besides, a little dash of humor."

"Yes, that is it," said Cecil.

"You don't care for your triumphs."

Cecil looked at him, and smiled a little wistfully. He had not spoken to her all day of what had happened yesterday, but his eyes reminded her of it now. How was she to tell him that some burning pain in her heart goaded her on, and how a conviction of her impotence and hopelessness, of the uselessness of trying to control her destiny, made her wreak her force on any opportunity within her power?

Rodney had no time to say more. He was called on again, and presently the whole circle of actors went on the stage, and the curtain went down amidst loud plaudits, and the play was over. Mr. Stein was on his feet at once, bowing, complimenting, overflowing with flattery. Never had he had such a company before! Nothing on the contemporary stage could equal it. Mrs. Dalton was the link which united the fervid past with the æsthetic and pictorial present; she was the *comédienne* of whom he had dreamed. Cecil's performance was praised; but the experienced manager saw behind the illusion of it: it was the result of excitement, the sensitiveness of strained nerves; it was very charming, still it was not art; but Mrs. Dalton he glorified. A group

gathered round her. She was on the pinnacle at once to which she had aspired; all the world — that is, all the world she could see at that moment — was at her feet.

Arthur Snow went up to pay her a compliment; but Mrs. Dalton did not like Arthur Snow, and especially now, when she had a vivid recollection that he had spoiled one of her best points. He offered her his pretty speech twice over, but she would not hear. He had to withdraw, and, stepping back without turning, he came in contact with Medhurst, who was crossing the stage.

"— you," cried Arthur, "what are you doing, — running against me like that? I'll" —

Medhurst looked at Arthur a moment, then seized him by the arm and walked him off the stage, through the scenes, across the little rear veranda, to the terrace, under the kindling stars.

"Now, look here, Mr. Arthur Snow," said he. "You have reached the limit. I have submitted to your impertinence through the play, because it was the ladies' wish to carry it out pleasantly; but the play is over. Just tell me what you mean by your insolence, your impudence, and your quarrelsomeness!"

Arthur was boiling over. Medhurst still held him in a vice; he had a grip like iron, and muscle was not Arthur's strong point; he could neither wriggle nor throw it off.

"Talk to me of impudence and insolence!" said he; "you — a — a — intrusive, presumptuous, meddling upstart!"

Medhurst was fairly astonished.

"Have you a grudge against me?" said he. "Have I done you wrong in any way?"

Medhurst had not lost his temper; he spoke incisively and irritably, but in a low voice. Arthur, on the other hand, screamed so loud that, but for the band playing inside, the whole house would have rung with his words. He presently burst into another tirade.

"Come, now," said Medhurst, "I should like to understand this. What have you got against me? I'll not let you go until I shake it out of you."

"You know well enough,—you, let me go!" roared Arthur.

"Tell me what it is, first."

"You knocked me down," declared Arthur, apparently quite forgetting how he had come to incur the attack.

"Knocked you down!—when?" Medhurst's mind ran hastily through his remembrance of the past few weeks.

"Do you mean to say," he exclaimed, "that it was you I found, lurking like a thief, in the grapery?"

"I had as much right to be there as you had. A better right! I wasn't stealing interviews with young ladies. I wasn't"—

Medhurst uttered an exclamation of disgust. He let go his hold of the other's arm, giving almost a push at the same time, which made Arthur stagger.

"You are beneath contempt. Go!" said he. "Hereafter I'll try to keep out of your way as I would out of a mad dog's."

Arthur had by no means had out his say, but

Medhurst seemed to him at the moment rather a dangerous character. There was something portentous in his look, and by this time Arthur knew the strength of his grip. He slunk off, glad that the interview had had neither listeners nor spectators.

Medhurst sank down on the stone step of the terrace. He was sick of it all; he was sick of his life. He looked up at the stars; he could almost have uttered a cry to them in his despair. He must get away from this, he said to himself; he would speak to Mr. Haxtoun the next morning, and put an end to the engagement at once. Mr. Hill had written, offering him a very good place on the paper, in place of Morton, who had been appointed consul at Algiers. He would take it and go. This life was not bearable. He would see Mr. Haxtoun to-night instead of to-morrow. By going home at once he might very likely contrive an interview with the old gentleman before he went to bed. He started up on the instant. No sooner was he on his feet than he became aware that he was not alone. Within three feet of him, just behind one of the tall roses, was Cecil Haxtoun. Though there was no moon, yet it was not dark. He saw her distinctly. She had on the gown she had worn in the last act, pale blue, trimmed with swan's-down. In this light it all looked alike, white as snow.

"You here!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I followed you. I was afraid you and Arthur" —

"Might quarrel? Forgive me for making a scene; but he had taken pains to insult me."

"I know it; I have seen it. It is dreadful. I will speak to papa about it."

"Oh, no matter; no matter! I shall see him no more. Nothing troubles me less than his existence."

"Something does trouble you."

"Yes, — one thought."

It was strange that she should be there, so near, and at the moment when he was telling himself that he must put miles of earth between him and her. Everything separated them, — honor, duty, every bristling obstacle fate can impose; and yet it was not enough. He must superimpose all the dead weight of separation, absence, absolutely diverging destinies.

"I wish," she said softly, — "I wish" —

"What do you wish?"

He had drawn nearer to her. He could see her lovely, pale face, her half-frightened eyes on the point of tears.

He could not help speaking.

"Do you know what it is to have one wish move you night and day, day and night, like a hunger, like a thirst, like" —

He broke off. He gazed at her steadily.

"I am going away," he added, brusquely. "Shall you care?"

"Going away, — going away from us?" she repeated.

"Yes. Shall you care? Shall you remember me after a day, after a week, after a month?"

She uttered a little cry; she flung out both her hands.

"If I could know — if I could know," he muttered, "if you cared a little for me, I might" —

She was trembling all over.

Ten moments later neither of them could have told exactly how it had happened. Perhaps he seized her fluttering, outstretched hands, and then she fell upon his breast. At least, she was there, and he held her in a passionate, silent embrace. Neither needed any words. He felt firm and proud. She was his own; no one should take her from him.

"Look up at me a moment," he said, in her ear.

She looked up.

"You must go in now. You are an important guest. You will be missed."

She shivered.

"Don't send me away."

He gave a little, proud laugh.

"Listen to me," said he. "You must go in. Meet me to-morrow morning, at seven o'clock, down by the old house."

"Yes."

"Say to me once, 'Frank, I love you.'"

She repeated it after him, eloquently enough to his ear. He softly drew her to himself again and kissed her lips.

"Go in now, my own," said he. He said it with some imperiousness; and she obeyed him without another word.

CHAPTER XXII.

TOO CLEVER BY HALF.

CECIL went swiftly towards the lighted house, conscious of a strength and happiness which would carry her safely through any ordeal. She did not know yet what she had done. She had not stopped to ask herself where she stood. For a time she had been powerless, — she had been in the meshes of her mother's net; she could not free herself, nor could she cry out that she longed to free herself. She had felt stubborn, rebellious, but all the time had helped to tie herself hand and foot in knots which she longed to undo. Now she told herself that she was free, — free as air except as she was bound to Medhurst. What had become of her tacit engagement to Rodney Heriot she did not ask. It was all a dream. Here was the reality. There was nothing delusive, phantom-like, unsubstantial, about her love for Medhurst. It brought every vague, shadowy feeling into the focus of a strong light. All her thoughts were with him, all her wishes were with him. Why had she been doubtful? How could she have been afraid? It had strangely simplified matters to acknowledge her love for him. The world, which had for a few days seemed great, and wide, and strange to her, had

suddenly narrowed down; she and Medhurst stood together in a world of their own.

These thoughts swam through her mind as she entered the house, but no sooner was she in the brilliant halls again, with vistas on either hand of the gayly dressed moving throngs, than the singleness of her impressions vanished. She came upon her father almost directly.

"Your mamma is looking for you," said Mr. Haxtoun, with an air of resigned melancholy. "Your mamma is so energetic, of late. Much as I appreciate the blessing of children, it must be confessed that a man destitute of offspring has a better chance of a quiet life."

"I don't mean to give you very much trouble, papa," observed Cecil, taking his arm.

"I have had perpetual alarms about you, of late, my dear. And that night you were on the river with Mr. Medhurst, there" —

Mr. Haxtoun might have gone on to enumerate the various occasions when his wife's superabundant anxiety had goaded him, spoiling his morning's work and his evening's pastime; but Rodney Heriot, passing through the hall, espied Cecil, and sprang towards her. Ever since the curtain went down upon the stage he had been, until this moment, engrossed by the claims of his guests; but now he was free to devote the rest of his time to Cecil.

"Do you want to dance?" he asked her.

But no, she did not want to dance, she told him.

"It is too warm to dance," said Mr. Haxtoun; "it would be very unsafe to take exercise with all the doors and windows open as they are here. That is

the reason I do not sit down, but constantly walk about, — there are draughts everywhere" —

"Except in the library, Mr. Haxtoun," said Rodney. "Go into the library, and shut all the windows. There are comfortable chairs there too" —

"And will you take care of Cecil?" asked the old gentleman, who was quite bewildered and worn out, and to whom this beacon beckoned enticingly.

"Yes," said Rodney, "I will take care of Cecil."

He put her hand under his arm and looked down at her. Mr. Haxtoun had walked away. "I will take care of Cecil," he said again.

Cecil looked at him once, then blushed vividly and turned away.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, almost as if to himself alone. "How beautiful you are!"

She tried to withdraw her hand from his arm, but he laughed, and would not let it go.

"Are you angry with me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I feel inclined to go on making you angry," said Rodney, in his light manner. "Here, ever since yesterday, I have felt like going mad with joy; but I have been obliged to walk steadily, to speak deliberately, to give directions, to listen to people, and, finally, to go through this stupid play. Do you want to know what I should like to do at this moment?"

Without answering she turned and looked at him with her brilliant eyes. What she intended to express was something menacing and portentous, but her glowing face spoke to him far otherwise.

"Close your eyes," said he; "they rob me of my senses."

She blushed still more furiously, and bent her head on her breast.

Rodney began to feel conscience-stricken. He hated himself for talking to her as if he held her beauty a lure and her innocence something to regard carelessly. He wished that he had not defrauded himself of the rights and worth of his temperament by his habit of accepting loose, light, and reckless views of things. Nothing could be sweeter and more sacred than his present impressions of Cecil, but he seemed unable to say anything which did not offend and shock her. But why should she not know, he asked himself, all that was in his mind? Why did she not understand him and believe in him? Was it because they were divided by so many years?

"Do not be afraid of me," said he. "You can hardly expect that I shall not be happy. I should be a dull fellow if I were not inexpressibly happy. I have always wanted happiness for myself, but, hitherto, I have not been very successful in achieving it. Let me try as I would for it, it failed me: I had disappointment, pain, sorrow, instead. Finally, I tried to teach myself that happiness did not exist for me; that the desire for happiness is not implanted in our minds because it is to have fruition; but, instead, that it may inspire fresh ideals and restimulate our flagging energies. I began to believe that self-renunciation, self-abnegation, was the only true source of peace. If that were so"— He looked at her, and almost in spite of himself tender, foolish words came from his lips.

Cecil had grown pale.

'Is not this a little out of place?" she asked, in a proud, still manner. "You would hardly care to be listened to, or observed."

"I will be on my good behavior. Let us be talking about something. There must be subjects in the world to talk about. There are times when life does not seem long enough to discuss the matters that come up. The universe seems such an extraordinary development. But at present it is of more interest to me that you have little white hands, that those little white hands have little tapering fingers, and that on one of those little tapering fingers I must" —

"I thought," said Cecil, with a swift gesture of disdain, "you were ready to talk about something sensible."

"Now, I thought that so sensible. But let us discuss gems. What kind of gems do you prefer?"

"I don't like any gems," said Cecil.

"Don't you? I think diamonds or pearls in your hair would be" —

"I dislike diamonds and pearls," persisted Cecil. "Nothing would induce me to wear them."

Rodney laughed. He liked the pretty, mutinous air. They had been walking slowly along the hall, and by this time had reached the picture-gallery, which, divested of its benches the moment the play was over, was now the ball-room. Enough dancing was going on to make it a pretty pageant, but the scene was not very gay. Alec Haxtoun was one of the few men who danced, and even he was a little aggrieved at being obliged to be on duty on so hot

a night. He had been waltzing with Mrs. Dalton as a reward for keeping up the entertainment; but now she had sat down to talk with the manager, Mr. Stein, and Alec was looking about him disconsolately, wondering if he had not made himself perspire sufficiently, when he caught sight of his sister.

"Going to dance, Cis?" he said, coming up to her.

"Oh, yes; if you ask me," replied Cecil.

"I will ask you," said Alec. "Mrs. Esté begged me to keep up the dancing, and I know no other way than to go on whirling perpetually. Nobody dances nowadays, — none but girls, that is. Talk about the relative strength of the sexes; a woman can waltz as if she were strung on wire, while a man becomes a mass of quivering jelly. I'm a mere pulp; but I will give you one waltz, Cissy. You don't dance, Heriot?"

"No, I don't dance. Not but that I might, in spite of my age. The only objection is, that I should not like to dance set figures. If I could execute a *pas seul* now, just to express my feelings!"

"Do," said Cecil. "Every one would be delighted to see something original and spontaneous in the way of a dance."

"I don't know," pursued Alec, still aggrieved, "what the gradual evolution of manners and customs will be; but, looking at present indications, it really seems to me that there will soon be no dancing men. Everybody is so deadly serious nowadays; there is no *laissez-aller* about us young fellows; our boots are too tight, our clothes fit too well, our hair is too smooth."

"Exactly," said Rodney. "Fifty years from now I fancy the social usage will be somewhat oriental; the men will sit on crimson velvet divans, smoking languidly, while the young girls dance for their own amusement and masculine edification."

Alec and Cecil were already moving away, and Rodney stood looking after the brother and sister, who danced with the perfection of constant habit. The childlike freshness of the young girl, her pliant grace, made her appear to be inspired by the music of the waltz; but, in fact, her heart was very heavy.

"I want to go home," she said to her brother. "Waltz on towards the staircase, and then find mamma."

"What is the matter? Are you tired?"

"No."

"Supper is not ready yet."

"I had forgotten supper," said Cecil, who felt feverishly restless and impatient to get away. "Then I suppose it is of no use for me to think of getting mamma to consent."

Rodney walked about as impatient as Cecil. The scanty chance he had to utter what was in his heart to the young girl mocked, rather than assuaged, the passion of his soul. The joyous music filled him with a sort of sadness. A single strain of it seemed to pursue him, haunting him when he was at a distance from the band, and when nearer coming with a sudden burst from the flute and violins. He was half-amused and half-proud to realize how deeply he was in love, he who had so long been an amateur, a connoisseur, that he had believed himself incapable of any simple, unmixed emotion. He had

not recognized his feeling at first. He had felt the thrall of it, but without any belief that his state of mind was to become fixed and permanent. What did Cecil's mysterious charm come from? Why had she so completely bewitched him? Perhaps it was because he was no longer young, that half-forgotten loves, ambitions, aspirations, had haunted him, inspiring dissatisfaction and remorse, and that she restored them.

As he moved restlessly about Fanny Dalton beckoned to him. Mr. Stein had been complimenting her on the success of the play. Now that it was over, the manager, who had found every fault while it was in progress, could not sufficiently praise the nicety and perfection of the acting, the promising condition of the whole troupe; he adding, of course, the warmest encomiums for Fanny herself, who he declared had only to come before the great public to receive universal recognition. She had, he said, by the mere talent for taking pains with her work, overcome all the hardest obstacles in her way; she had the wit to see what were the essential points, and these she had seized: a brilliant future was before her.

Fanny, however, was a little petulant and irritated. What had her triumph to-night been after all? In spite of her painstaking efforts to achieve a legitimate success, Cecil, without artistic instinct or knowledge, had equalled, if not surpassed, her.

The girl's beauty, the general admiration she elicited from her well-known position, the peculiar suitability of the *rôle* she had assumed, were all in her favor. The *éclat* had been an accident. But

Fanny realized that every one who sets himself a task is at the mercy of unforeseen malign forces in some shape, but, all the same, actual lions in the path to be contended against and conquered. Mrs. Dalton wanted to be sure of easy successes; she wanted them, too, to be successes which belonged only to first-class artists. And when Mr. Stein compared her to certain actresses already on the stage there was some disillusionment.

"What do you think Mr. Stein tells me?" she asked Rodney Heriot, after beckoning him to approach.

"That you are a very brilliant actress."

"That goes without saying," put in Mr. Stein. "What I say is, that she is sure of a good engagement if she will only go upon the stage."

"But then," exclaimed Fanny, "Mr. Stein's ideas and mine are so different concerning an engagement. So long as a castle is in the air it assumes quite palatial proportions, but once set it down on *terra firma*, and look at it soberly, and its peaks and pinnacles appear for what they are worth. He tells me where I can act, and what my salary will be by the week, and all the magnificence goes out of my scheme. I thought I might make a great deal of money."

"And so you can, and so you shall," insisted Mr. Stein. "You must not, of course, expect the great gains of a queen of the operatic stage; but as a comedy actress" —

Mr. Stein went on eloquently, but to Fanny the brilliancy of the career was tarnished, its successes

questionable, its promises futile. The play had disappointed her.

"Miss Haxtoun carried off all the honors," said she.

"Miss Haxtoun," almost shrieked Mr. Stein, — "she cannot act. She has the archness, the vivacity, the piquancy, of a kitten, whose gambols are irresistible when it is in the mood, but who" —

"Is not equal to a trained dog, for instance," said Rodney. "Oh, you will be in a better mood to-morrow, Fanny. You feel the reaction from the champagne of the play. That is the curse of artists, actors, and authors, — their spirits come and go like the tide."

But the most philosophical of reflections could not banish the miserable, almost inexplicable, discontent that darkened Fanny's hour, which ought to have been one of complete triumph. Success is a delicate fruit, and loses its flavor if it falls and is scrambled for.

"Ask me to dance," she whispered to Rodney Heriot.

He complied, and she rose, took his arm, and walked away.

"I hope you do not think I am going to dance," he remarked, when they were out of hearing of the fussy, zealous little Mr. Stein, whose coveted praise had suddenly lost all its worth. Had she failed she would have felt nothing of all this disgust; she felt it by virtue of a sense only acquired by what seems to an imaginative person a half-success.

"No, I do not want to dance," declared Fanny.

"I no longer feel young. I no longer care about the satisfactions of youth. I want, instead, the consolations of middle life."

"That is what I am after as well as you," said Rodney.

"Does Miss Haxtoun belong to that category?" inquired Fanny.

Rodney said nothing, and she went on.

"I begin to feel that there is a fatality about that girl. There are people by whom it is foredoomed that we shall suffer. She looks innocent; like a kitten, as Mr. Stein says. But she meets me at every turn tormenting and thwarting me. It is not a fair contest; she has superior weapons to mine, and I grow disheartened and throw down my arms. I had taught myself to bear other things with complacency; but when she entered my own field, and surpassed me on the stage, that was too much humiliation."

Rodney listened, half-amused. He knew that Fanny was really annoyed, and that she bore Cecil a grudge, and longed to revenge herself. He felt a little curious to know what she was about to say, how she would substantiate her words. She rarely talked at random; she habitually sought to create an effect, and there was no doubt but that she wanted to move him now. He experienced a desire to laugh, but, instead, turned to her with an exaggerated seriousness and repeated: —

"Too much humiliation! Don't say that."

Fanny laughed slightly.

"What a tragical tone! I shall survive it. I am used to failures. I am a failure all through.

But she might have left me my old love. I always used to think I could reckon on Frank Medhurst."

"Oh, you are thinking about Medhurst?" asked Rodney, with some eagerness. "By-the-by, I saw him in a fine fury, the other day. He was quite out of humor with his life, — declared he was going away."

"Did he tell you why?"

"No; but the position has always fretted him; and, indeed, what man of any real mental energy could go on with old Haxtoun?"

"He is in love with Mr. Haxtoun's daughter," said Fanny, looking her companion in the face.

"I dare say he admires her," exclaimed Rodney. "Don't make me think you are morbidly jealous where she is concerned."

"I know everything about it," said Fanny. "Do you want me to tell you what I know?"

She spoke with the utmost sweetness, yet there was something pointed, and even menacing, in her tone. The two were standing near a window in the main parlor. The supper-room was open, and people were going and coming, and servants were passing about with trays of ices and champagne cups.

"I do not believe you know anything," said Rodney. "And, if you did, what right have you to tell it? If it is a secret confided to you, certainly you should be silent; and if you have surprised it, — of course then it must be forever buried in your own mind. If Medhurst admires Miss Haxtoun he has a right to admire her. That he was actually in

love with her would be his misfortune. He is an honorable fellow, and would not allow himself to be led captive by any such feeling."

Rodney's manner was cold, and almost brusque.

"Wait a moment," said Fanny. "Remember how much the matter means to me. I had no doubt, at first, that Frank was faithful to me; and when I found him half-indifferent I believed that he was unforgiving. I had done him a great wrong when he was a *naïve*, passionate, clever boy; and I could hardly blame him if he refused to accept me on the old terms. I tried to show him my remorse; but I presently made the discovery that he was well over even his anger with me. He had dismissed his youthful feeling, and was wholly engrossed by something newer, fresher, and, besides, more promising."

"I confess," said Rodney, with apparent indifference, "at one time I thought Medhurst was a little in love with that young lady. But the impression passed. You came, and certainly he seemed to be devoted to you."

"But he was not. He denied his real feeling; he was visited by compunctions with regard to you. He hated, besides, the idea that he had nothing to lose, and everything to gain" —

Rodney made a gesture for her to be silent. A strange feeling, made up of doubt, alarm, stupor, and rage, took possession of him. He had suspected that something was going on, — he had not been blind, — but he had found it easier to trust his fellow-creatures than to impute bad motives to them.

There seemed to be some black, unknown gulf of knowledge into which Fanny longed to plunge him,

and he trembled at the ordeal; but what matter, after all? What did anything count? Suppose Medhurst cared for Cecil, — suppose, indeed, Cecil cared for him? If it were a mere feeling, unconfessed, unspoken— Had Medhurst once presumed to acquaint Cecil with his feelings — His anger grew: he should know how to punish a fellow like that, who stole into a girl's confidence. He was all tense, alert, ready to spring. The music, which had ceased for a time, began again with some old, worn, but sweet, Italian *aria*.

"Girls generally have several suitors," Rodney now remarked blandly. "Miss Haxtoun deserves as many as the most charming of them."

"She has accepted one to-night," said Fanny, with a soft voice and a dazzling smile.

"To-night?"

"Yes, to-night, on the terrace, — just after the play was over."

Rodney stood still, his arms tightly folded.

Fanny's voice sounded strange to him, as if some one else were speaking. Had he heard aright? No, this was some trick of phrase, some joke; at least the thing was an accident, he need not adjust his consciousness to it. The reason it had struck him with so much force was that he alone knew the absurdity of it.

"As you say," she went on, "having come accidentally upon the declaration and acceptance, and unwittingly seen her in his arms" —

"Oh, come!" said Rodney, in a voice of disgust. He looked at her indignantly and reproachfully. His lips curled scornfully. "Let us go and

have a glass of champagne," said he. "The rush is over in the supper-room, and we may be able to sit down and eat a cream-ice comfortably."

"You are not angry with me, are you, Rodney?" Fanny asked, with a little tremulousness in her voice. She began to believe that she had erred in judgment, and would have tried, if she could, to repair her error; but his closed lips expressed such disdain she felt a sort of confusion, wholly doubted herself, and wondered why she had permitted her tongue to utter the words she had been eager to force upon him.

Rodney led her into the supper-room, put her in a chair, and called the butler to her. Then he walked to the sideboard and took up a decanter of brandy, and poured out a small glass. He gazed into it a moment, scrutinizing it as if it were something to be analyzed and studied, then lifted it to his lips. He set it down untasted, however.

"No, I won't do this yet, at all events," he said, half-aloud.

He looked about the dining-room, then went out and glanced into every room by turns. He was looking for Cecil, but found her nowhere. He encountered Alec Haxtoun presently, who was walking up and down at the foot of the staircase, talking with Arthur Snow, who, even to Rodney Heriot's perceptions, ordinarily very careless concerning this young man, was in some peculiar state of agitation. Alec, however, received his torrent of incoherent words with anything but seriousness.

"Look here, Heriot," said he, with a burst of

laughter, "you have been everywhere, done everything, and you must know the code of honor and all its etiquette. Here's a young fellow who wants to fight a duel, and you may be able to help him."

"Whom does he want to kill?" inquired Rodney, — "Stein, the manager? He was hard on you, Snow."

"It isn't Stein, — it's Medhurst," said Alec, laughing again.

"Medhurst?" repeated Rodney, with some surprise. "What has Medhurst done?" He, too, began to laugh. "Medhurst seems to be turning everything topsy-turvy," he remarked.

"Well, will you be Arthur's second?"

"With all my heart. Shall I wait on Medhurst to-night or to-morrow morning?"

Snow turned very sulky. "You are making fun of me," said he; "but I am intensely serious. Medhurst has insulted me, and I want satisfaction. I don't know about duels, — they seem to be obsolete, — but there ought to be some sort of reparation."

"Oh, fight him! Revive the duel, — shoot him or stab him," said Alec.

"He insulted you, did he?" asked Rodney, looking at Snow's fierce, puckered face. "Ah, well, you know we are highly civilized and perfectly Christian nowadays! If he smites one cheek turn the other; be patient, be generous, — or else go and knock him down."

"But he began by knocking Arthur down," said Alec.

"He seems to be the devil of a fellow," said Rodney.

It was possible that Arthur had taken a little too much wine, or else he was lighter-headed than usual.

"I could make you quarrel with him, Heriot," he now said malignantly. "You had better look out that he does not undermine you with" —

"Hold your tongue, you idiot!" said Rodney, angrily. "Haxtoun, get this quarrelsome cur out of the way, won't you? I won't have him blabbing his maudlin nonsense in this house. Here come the ladies."

And at that moment Mrs. Haxtoun, Miss Winchester, and Cecil appeared on the stairs; Cecil following the other two, and carrying on her arm a soft white mantle, which seemed all made of feathers and down. Rodney went up to her as she reached the lowest stair.

"I have been looking for you," said he.

He took the cloak from her and stood blocking her way. She was raised a little above him, and he looked up into her face with a persistent interrogation in his own; his forehead was contracted, his eyes imperious, his lips tightly closed.

"I don't know," he murmured, "whether to let you go or not. It seems safer to keep you. Who knows what may happen?"

She did not answer a word. She could not even sustain his glance. A scorching sensation of shame consumed her.

"I shall see you to-morrow," he said, gently.

He stepped aside and allowed her to pass, and, following her, put the cloak over her shoulders and

drew the hood over her head. She turned and looked at him while he did this with a soft, childlike glance, a little embarrassed, but very sweet and gracious.

"Do you know what you have done for me?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Drawn away my good, useful, comfortable heart, and put a thorn in its place."

Mrs. Haxtoun was already in the carriage, and now called to her daughter. She also addressed Rodney, but he did not seem to hear her. Somebody else put Cecil in, and shut the door. Rodney stood on the porch for a while, in a sort of stupor, conscious of an intense heaviness weighing upon him without admitting to himself what it was. He was afraid to give way to passion; he was afraid to be alone, lest he should become violent and agitated. The guests were leaving singly and in groups. He stood aside and let them pass, without turning his face from the shadow. When the last carriage had rolled away, he went in, and found his mother and Mrs. Dalton sitting in the parlor, the former drinking *bouillon*.

"I wondered where you were, Rodney," said Mrs. Esté. "You left it all for me to do."

"Of course I did."

"I am so warm, and so very, very tired. There were so many people, and I had to remember their names and something about their families. It is so hard to remember people's names."

"The deuce of a bore! They ought to have little labels affixed; or why shouldn't they be signed, like pictures?"

"Then I should have to get out my eye-glass to read the signatures," said Mrs. Esté. "And, after all, what is the use of knowing their names? All the men and women I used to know and care about are dead, and the new ones tire me. They know nothing about what used to be my delight and my comfort. I can turn to none of them and say, 'Do you remember when we were there together, that day?' or, 'What was it we were doing when he came?' Nobody knows my past; it is all locked up in my own mind, and when I get a glimpse of it it is like a Medusa's head, — it strikes me dead."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Rodney. "Our generation can't talk like that."

"No, indeed. I don't like the present generation. I am tired of my kingdom, Rodney. I am ready to pass it all over to you. You shall have a beautiful young wife, and she shall have my place."

Mrs. Esté rose. She was dressed magnificently, in point and diamonds; she wore a little coronet on her white curls. She was very feeble, nevertheless; she tottered across to her son, and lifted her cheek to be kissed. He flung his arms about her, instead, and embraced her ardently.

"O my old mother!" he muttered, "my old mother!"

She fluttered away from his arms with the air of a bird smoothing down her ruffled plumage.

"You are as rough as you used to be as a boy," said she. "Good-night! Good-night, Fanny!" And she went off on her maid's arm.

Mrs. Dalton made a very pretty picture coiled up

on a sofa, watching the little scene between her half-closed eyelids.

"Have you forgiven me?" she asked, when they were alone.

Rodney turned and bent upon her a piercing look. He said to himself that she was very pertinacious, and that such pertinacity must have some cause.

"Forgive you!" said he. "I have nothing to forgive that I remember. Certainly, I have no anger against you."

"I am glad of that."

"On the contrary, I admire you," pursued Rodney; "you look very well — half-sitting, half-reclining, there. It is impossible not to acknowledge the bewitchingness of that attitude, with your bare arms raised to the back of your head."

Fanny laughed.

"You are an artist, — you see the picture, not the woman."

"The artist in me only makes me appreciate you the more," persisted Rodney. "I am thinking about yourself, and not your beauty, at this moment. I am suddenly curious concerning you."

"If I could believe that!"

"You may. I was thinking about what you said of Medhurst, — that you had looked forward to seeing him attentive, humble, devoted, again. Of course, it could have been so, if you had desired it. I fancy he discovered some indifference in you. Perhaps you were too lukewarm. Once interested in a man you would not readily let him escape."

"I don't feel sure whether that is flattery or reproach."

"Men are like children: they like light, warmth, and companionship; they hate silence, darkness, and solitude. These influences are all-powerful. If you had cared, or seemed to care, for Medhurst he would have returned to you at once. You are not a woman whom men forget. You have had your mind on something else, — the play, perhaps. Or is there some other man in your thoughts? I am not asking, you know. I am merely speaking my thoughts aloud."

He paused and looked at her. She had grown pensive; her eyes were bent on the floor; a little color tinged her cheek.

"I think," she said, softly, "you understand me."

"I should like to see you in love," he continued. "You are proud; you have self-restraint; you are not given to lavish sentiment. If your heart once fully awoke" —

She raised her eyes and fixed them on him.

"You are enigmatical," she said.

"If your heart once fully awoke," he pursued, "it would carry you a long way. But the question is, could your heart be fully aroused? Could you fall in love?"

Fanny half rose, then sank back on the sofa. She was a little agitated, and her features all showed the effort of self-repression. One would have said, too, that it was a joyful emotion, almost a triumph, to which she was half yielding.

Rodney regarded her with singular composure.

"Tell me," he now said softly.

For answer she only lifted her eyes and looked

at him, and still, with her glance fixed on him, she stood up.

"I had better say good-night. It is late," she murmured.

"Yes, it is late,—you had better say good-night," said Rodney, approaching her. "I wish you would tell me first," he went on, "who it is you love."

Fanny shook from head to foot, as if she were cold.

"Somebody who does not love me in return," she exclaimed, with a swift anger. "Somebody at whose feet I might throw myself, but who would not even stoop to pick me up. Somebody whom I love as he has never been loved, and will never be loved again."

Rodney looked at her with a cool, attentive look. "Generous Fanny!" he said softly, and took her hand.

"What did you mean?" she cried, her face frowning suddenly as black as a thunder-cloud. She felt that she had been insulted and humiliated, but yet was chiefly in a fury with herself for having been led on against her reason and against her will, dazzled by the delusive hope his words held out. She tried to tear her hand away from him; but he held it fast, and would not let it go, not seeming to perceive either her anger or her agitation.

"Must you go?" he asked, in a drowsy voice. "Ah, well, sleep sweetly, Fanny!"

He led her to the door with an air of chivalrous courtesy, and then raised her hand as if to imprint

a kiss upon it. But it was a mere form; he bent his head, then raised it with a smiling air.

"Good-night!" he said again, and then closed the door after her. Left alone in the parlor where all the lights were still burning, he said to himself: —

"She is a devil of a woman!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"HAD I WIST BEFORE I KIST."

JUST between the old Haxtoun house and the river was a densely shaded little nook, overhung by vines and creepers, which, finding no longer a foothold on the stone-walls, turned for support to the nearest tree, which they had dwarfed and twisted into the shape of a bamboo. Late in the day this quiet niche was dark as night, beneath the thick greenery, but the early morning sun searched it through with its first beams; and it was here that Medhurst waited for Cecil. He had left the house long before sunrise, for he had scarcely slept at all. Towards morning he had been suddenly overtaken by slumber, which lasted but a few moments, but which was sufficient to mark the dividing line between yesterday and to-day. He had gone to sleep still under the dominion of the imperious sentiment which had made it easy for him to accept the young girl's love. The barriers between them were all down: she was sweet and precious to him: she was necessary, beyond all things necessary, and she was his. He had sunk into unconsciousness, feeling that he clasped and possessed the treasure of the world. He awoke presently in quite a different mood. He rose,

dressed, and went out of doors, while the auroral vapors were vanishing. The sky grew rosy, then pearly; luminous clouds floated over the east; but he had no eyes for the glories of the new day. He said to himself, as he paced the damp turf, that he knew the sensations of a man who recovers his reason after an interval of insanity, and finds that, carried away by his delirium, he has committed a heinous crime. He sank in his self-respect when he remembered that, by accident, by the merest momentary impulse, he had done the very thing he had sworn to himself he would never do. He had been conquered by the sight of the young girl in the half-light, her eyes fixed on him, her lips tremulous, her little hands fluttering towards him, and he had not tried to resist the sorcery of this magical temptation. A burning fire ran through his veins still, as he remembered that moment; yet the keenest self-reproach governed him. She was so young, so inexperienced; he had declared to himself, over and over, that he would save her from her own generosity. Had he been out of his senses? If the revelation of feeling had been the end of it he might have carried the precious, potent memory to the end of his days, and have been the richer for it. But to have leaped into the position of accepted lover, the prospective husband of this young princess! The idea was preposterous; wildly, frantically absurd. He was ashamed of himself that, even for a moment, this revolting incongruity had seemed no incongruity at all, but a delightful and perfected ideal of existence. It was spoliation; it was robbery to deprive her of her happy, girlish life and offer her in

return a share of his own tame, meagre, shabby existence. And he had never had any intention of doing it. He seemed to have been swept on by a current of outside forces, apparently powerless to resist. Now that the vivid impression upon his imagination had faded away he was ready to impute the worst motives to himself, to find himself wholly without excuse for his conduct. There was no logical gap between his state of mind of yesterday and to-day into which he could interpolate this bewildering episode.

The glamour, the extraordinary *naïveté* of his state of mind, the night before, was the most surprising thing in his experience.

The day was well awake by this time. The river was flashing with motion and light. There were indistinct murmurs, movings, and beatings all through the shrubberies and grass. Birds were darting everywhere, whirring, clamoring with an exuberance of energy; the drone of the insects had begun. Medhurst looked at his watch. Two hours had passed since he came down from his room; it was nearing seven o'clock. Would Cecil keep the appointment he had so imperiously made? He seemed to see her lying on her pillow, like a lily, half-asleep, half-waking, the white petals just unclosed. Before her mind would be floating a diaphanous and rose-colored mist of memories and hopes; in this half daylight of her thoughts she would remember the kiss he had given her the night before. Would it be with a smile on her parted lips, and a laugh in her rich eyes, or with a blush and a sudden quickening of

some nameless terror, which made her turn and hide her face, perhaps annihilated sentiment, passion, tenderness, at a breath?

But he could not think of her without melting. He had it in his heart to wish that she had been more proud, more consistent, less generous, less seductive. Yet, just as she had been, just as she was, he worshipped her. What had she seen in him to believe in, trust, and cling to? If he were worthy, how was she to know it? And yet, in some dim way, the instinct of faith in him had moved her from the first. All at once he remembered the night he had rowed her up the river, and the heavens above and the waters below them glowed with the colors of the sunset, and the atmosphere about them, seemed magically lit.

. . . .

Certainly he was in a strange frame of mind: on the one side led by all the illusions of a passionate love, and, on the other, restrained, dominated, tyrannized over. Twice he had thought he saw a white dress in the distance; but once it was the trunk of a white birch, which the swaying branches first hid, and then disclosed; then it was the gleam of the opening lilies, which he mistook for Cecil's shining raiment. But now, all at once, his heart began to beat swiftly and strongly. It was no error of his senses this time. The young girl herself was coming down the walk, a little slowly, a little abashed, with childlike intentness and seriousness diffused over her whole face and manner.

Involuntarily Medhurst started up. He was

ready to fall on his knees. A strong sense of the reality of all that had passed between them surged back, governing his consciousness. He was not worthy of her, but she had sought him out; she had made him her equal; she had given him her love; and could he not be grateful, could he not be loyal? Was she not the embodiment of all he loved best in the world? Her clear, frank glance as she approached sent peace into his very soul. But, as he went forward to meet her, he did not even touch her hand.

"It was good of you to come," he said softly. "Sit down."

She sat down on the bench at the foot of the tree, and he took his place by her side. She wore a wide-brimmed hat, which, as she leaned her chin upon her hand, hid all but the rosy oval of the cheek and the milk-white throat. Medhurst could see that she was trembling; her fingers fluttered, and he laid his own upon them.

"Tell me, Cecil," said he, "are you of the same mind you were last evening? What did you think of when you awoke, — that you were mine?" He went on, with increasing agitation: "Has that little flutter of kind feeling lasted all night, or are you more clear-eyed now, and do you see me as I am?"

For answer she lifted her head and turned her lovely face towards him, so radiant, so dazzling, that he felt almost blinded by it; then, all at once, with a bird's swiftness, she stooped and leaned her cheek against his hand.

"You know," said he, "that I am a beggar. I can give you no luxuries, — none. I will try to take

care of you so that you need know no suffering, no great privation; but, Heaven help me, I seem to be an unlucky man. Hitherto I have not prospered, and I may not prosper in the years to come."

She looked at him and smiled. "I am not poor," she whispered. "I have money of my own."

He dropped her hand and started up. "Don't say that; don't think of it yourself," he exclaimed, throwing off the suggestion as if it stung him. "For me to come here, — to steal your love; to profit by it, — that would be the final humiliation. I had no right ever to think of you, none. I knew it all the time. I had no intention of speaking to you last night, but the words burst from me. I — I" —

Cecil was gazing at him as if fascinated.

"It was I who was to blame," she faltered.

This innocent speech almost cost him the remnants of his self-control.

"You know," said he, "I had decided to go away."

"But you could not have gone away," said Cecil. "Do you know that I dreamed last night that you were gone?"

She looked up at him, half-smiling, half-reproachful.

"Let your dream come true," said he, with a supreme effort. "I will go away. All you have to do is to go back to the house now, and never think of me again. You need be troubled by me no more. I feel it — I know it — I have neither part nor lot in your life."

He was conscious of his harshness, of his brutality even. But only two courses seemed open to him, —

either to clasp her to his heart, or to fling her from him. He must either be tender or be hard; he was not strong enough to be both. She listened to him at first with a face of ardent remonstrance, which gradually changed into a sort of white despair. There was silence for a long moment after he had finished, when she continued to gaze at him; then she rose. Tears had rushed to her eyes and blinded her, and a little, choking sob met his ear. Medhurst was seized by a strange feeling. He saw that she took him at his word: that she was about to go, and he knew it was better that she should leave him. When she went she would take everything from him; but, at least, he had done his duty, and freed her from the consequences of her mistake. But, at the sound of the sob, something stronger than his logic or his will clutched at his consciousness. He put his hand on her dress to detain her a moment.

"You know," he said, terribly agitated, "that I love you with my whole heart, — that — it — kills — me — to — give — you — up."

She sank back on the seat, covered her face with her hands, and broke into overflowing sobs and tears.

"But what I mean is," he went on, "that my love counts for nothing. I can give up the woman I love — but not the woman who loves me."

She looked up at him a moment, and they both smiled.

"If you really love me," she began, in a broken voice.

"*If* I love you," repeated Medhurst, still smiling.

"But do you?" she demanded, her whole tear-stained face full of entreaty.

"I don't dare trust myself," said Medhurst; and it was exactly as he had said — that he was afraid to trust himself. "I should be glad enough to feel that our destiny is chosen, — that nothing can alter it. But I know — my reason tells me there is no fatality about this — a choice is still open to you. I do not feel that I have the right to shut down all the doors of your fate except the one which opens on me. If circumstances were different; if you had no other suitor"—

Cecil made a gesture of despair.

"You are cruel to speak of him," she said, as if heart-broken. "I told you I dreamed last night that you had gone away. I knew that you were gone, and would never come back. I knew, too, that I could never follow you, and all that remained for me was to be Mr. Heriot's wife. He was talking to me and looking at me, smiling all the time just as he had smiled in the evening; and I hated him. I longed to be free of him. It was a great misery; it weighed on my heart; it turned me cold and sick, and I said to myself, I must somehow be free. I must wrench myself away. But when I tried to do it he would not let me go; he held me tight, and at the horror of this I woke up, and, oh, I sobbed with joy that it was not true, — that you had not gone away; that you were here to decide for me — to be strong for me."

Medhurst had fallen on his knees before her.

"How can you prefer me to Heriot?" he asked, looking into her face. "Heriot has everything; he is more attractive than I am, a thousand times more

attractive, and far cleverer. On my word, I believe you ought to be in love with Heriot."

"And there is Mrs. Dalton," returned Cecil, "more beautiful and charming than I am a thousand times." Medhurst laughed slightly. "I always knew you were in love with her"—

"You were jealous of her; it turned my brain to believe it, but I knew it all the time. I do almost dare to think you love me. But"—

"Oh, but — too many buts"—

"Your mother will hate me. You will have to stem the full tide of the current against me, — now, with Heriot, wind and tide are favorable."

"Are you afraid?"

He flung his arm about her. "Afraid? I am afraid of nothing but doing you some injury."

He was ready to forget everything again. She was so near to him, so simple, so trusting, so absolutely true in heart and feeling, he was ready to dismiss his self-accusations and draw her to his heart. But some glimmer of an instinct, blind, but unerring, made him say: —

"That was a strange dream of yours."

"It was a hideous dream."

"Heriot has never spoken to you, I believe?"

"Spoken to me?" she repeated, as if uncertain of his meaning.

"He has not made love to you?"

"He has been making love to me all the time," cried Cecil, indignantly.

"Good God!" ejaculated Medhurst, withdrawing his arm from her waist. "What do you mean?"

"I could not help it," said Cecil. "I did not

like it; but mamma wished it. At first," she went on, "I thought you were to marry Mrs. Dalton, and that nothing mattered."

Medhurst had risen to his feet.

"Cecil," said he, "tell me clearly what you are alluding to. Has Mr. Heriot made you an offer of marriage?"

"Yes," she answered, timidly.

"Did you accept or refuse him?"

"He made the offer to mamma, and she accepted it for me. Mamma told me it was all arranged; that it was to be. I did not feel it so. I could not tell what to do" —

"Do you mean to say you are engaged to Heriot?"

"I have not told him so; but" —

"But what?"

"He thinks so."

"Thinks you are engaged to him?"

She nodded.

"Since when?"

"Since the day of the picnic."

"Two days ago." Medhurst gazed at her; she looked like a creature in pain, but he could not spare her.

"He is your accepted lover, then."

"Oh, no — no — no!"

"Has he not considered himself your accepted lover?"

She was trembling painfully; her color came and went.

"Tell me! — tell me!" he cried, impatiently.

"I am frightened," she murmured. "You are angry with me."

"Last night," said he, shivering as if with cold, "when I reached out my arms" —

It was impossible for him to utter what was in his mind. Remembering the look in her eyes as they met his, the way her hands had fluttered like timid little birds into his own, the kiss he had taken from her lips, he felt dizzy and sick. A thousand miserable thoughts swarmed through his mind. "How could you," he cried, stung by pain, — "how could you treat me so?"

Cecil's face was absolutely calm; it was the calmness of a gathering despair at the gradual comprehension of where she stood. She pressed her hands to her temples.

"It is Mr. Heriot I have treated badly," she said, with a look as if she were standing on some giddy height and gazing on the depths below. "It is you I have thought of all the time and never of him."

Medhurst listened without gaining any accurate impression from her words.

"I knew from the first that he loved you, — that he was trying to win you. You do not know exactly what you have done, Cecil, and God forbid that you ever should. One thing is clear: if you are promised to Heriot you are in no way mine. His rights are prior, superior. I yield mine."

"I thought," said Cecil, "that you would help me."

"Help you? What help do you need of mine?"

"You are not kind; you are not generous to me."

Medhurst looked at her with a bitter smile.

"You don't know, — you don't know," he said, very quietly.

"Let me tell you all, and then you will know," cried Cecil. Her voice almost failed her. She was sobbing; her lips were trembling, — she looked ready to fall at his feet.

"I don't feel chivalrous — I don't feel generous," said he. "But do not think I am angry with you, Cecil. I do not dare to think about you at all. I have been a fool, — that might be borne; but I have also been disloyal and dishonest to a man who was kind to me. Cecil, I am not sure at this moment what to do or what to say. A few hours hence perhaps" — He placed both hands upon her head.

"O my God!" he muttered; "and once I thought you were mine!" He looked racked and tormented. She did not know a thousandth part of the gust of passion that had shaken him.

"A few hours later," he repeated, in a mechanical voice, and left her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MEDHURST CUTS THE GORDIAN KNOT.

TOWARDS noon that day Rodney Heriot walked along Mr. Haxtoun's lawn to the spot just outside the study window where Medhurst was sitting at his work, and asked him to come out and walk. Medhurst hesitated a moment, then pushed back his chair, rose, and took his hat.

"Very well," said he, "I will go. Let me speak to Mr. Haxtoun first."

Rodney had not moved from the place when Medhurst came round the house and joined him. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"Have you any choice?"

"None."

"Then let us go back on the hills as far as we can walk. The day is beautiful, — not too warm. In fact, the breeze is cool."

They struck straight across the grounds, and at the stile found Rodney's dogs waiting for him impatiently.

"You don't object to the animals, I hope," Rodney said.

"Quite the contrary," Medhurst replied.

"They need to be watched, or they will get into mischief. They love to run something down; they

are cruel beasts. But then they know not what they do. We are all cruel until we find out how other people's pain hurts us."

Medhurst may or may not have listened, but he said nothing. They crossed the road, skirted a place opposite, climbed a high fence, and found themselves on the slope of a long hill filled with luxuriant rye ready for the harvest. The golden stalks were higher than their heads as they took the narrow path which cut diagonally across the great field. The brilliant sky above, the sunlight striking through the faintly nodding ears to the slender stalks below, gave curious effects of light. Rodney led the way, followed in single file by the dogs, each bent on good behavior,—Max solemn, and Duke with a sort of tricky travesty of majesty. Medhurst lagged behind, listless and languid. Some of his faculties were keenly awake, others were asleep. At the top of the hill the plantation ended abruptly, and the woods began. The deep shade promised rest and coolness, but there was no proposal to sit down. Rodney allowed his dogs to let off their suppressed spirits, and himself led them into extravagant antics. To his companion he hardly spoke; and Medhurst, on his side, was in a sombre, inexorable mood he was not yet ready to break. When, presently, he should make an effort and conquer this dull, brooding passivity, he was uncertain what he should say and how he should act. Beyond the strip of woods began a higher hill, which was the loftiest eminence for miles around. They set out to climb it with a dogged persistence. The sun was on their backs; they no longer felt a breath of the reviving breeze,

and when they had gained the top they flung themselves down under an oak tree. A wide view rewarded them at this point. The horizon was withdrawn on the east, north, and south, far beyond the river, whose course, though it could not be seen, might be identified by the multiplying beams of light which the air took on above the line of water. Silent wooded hills, rising fold on fold, closed in the west with occasional glimpses of green meadow lands and the yellow stubble of harvested fields. At no great distance a farmer was cutting his rye, the reaper going round and round like a windmill, cutting and tossing the stalks in long, regular, swathes.

"A pretty view, is it not?" said Rodney, speaking at last.

"Yes. Listen to the drowsy hum! And do you feel the heat? It comes in waves, with a cooler breath between."

Rodney's tongue was unloosed, and he began to talk. He saw the shadow of a bird flying between him and the sun, and it set him telling stories of all the birds he knew. He could recognize each one by its flight and its habit of dropping to seize its prey. He was apparently in all nature's secrets. He could tell about the ants which crawled over them, and the bees which buzzed past them. He pointed out a couple of rabbits at a distance down the slope before even the dogs discovered their proximity and pricked up their ears. The little gray creatures, with all their sharp instincts, went on nibbling at the clover, never thinking to keep a lookout against an enemy above them. Rodney had always wondered, so he

now said, that he had not been created an animal with four legs, instead of two. He hated the complexities of human existence. "Animals are egotists," he affirmed; "but then each knows by instinct just what he requires to make him happy, and he seizes it with an utter indifference to what does not belong to him. Man, on the contrary, a being cursed with imagination, is constantly inventing new ideas and new desires. He does not analyze his own needs: he knows neither what his will is, nor what his want is. All that it is possible for the whole universe of mankind to have, he, as an individual, must possess. No matter if the possession is costly, cumbersome; in fact, a trouble and a pain, — so long as his mind can conceive it, his miserable, jealous, ambitious spirit is not at rest until he has it, or has broken his heart and ruined his life in a struggle to attain it."

"There is something in what you say," said Medhurst, who had paid little attention to what seemed at first mere rhodomontade, but now began to insert its point into his consciousness like a carefully driven wedge. "But then, is not civilization the product of this imitation, envy, ambition? Does not the real zest of life come from its competitions, since every man tries to pass his fellow-man by a stride, at least?"

"Don't generalize — don't go off into the abstract. Apply your ideas to real life, to the concrete."

"I have nothing concrete," retorted Medhurst. "Let a poor devil like me enjoy a limitless abstract."

"What I was going to add was this," pursued

Rodney. "A man wants what can do him no good. Take, for instance, a man doomed to early death; why does he not give up what he has no right to enjoy? But, no; instead of yielding to his fate, as a beast yields, he measures his requirements by his incapacities. Powerless to accept love and happiness, he still struggles for love and happiness."

"You don't mean that," said Medhurst, interrupting eagerly. "Don't take a sick man; take, instead, one like me, — an unsuccessful one,— one who knows himself, and whom others know, to be a complete failure. Make him your illustration. He is the one who most needs to limit himself and feel the inexorable 'must'; yet he is, on the contrary, the most intolerant of realties, and the most obstinate dreamer. He wants — God help him! — love and happiness."

The two exchanged glances.

"Don't take my words to yourself," muttered Rodney, changing color.

"But how could I help it?"

"I don't know what I meant. How warm it is! The dogs are thirsty. Sit still a moment, and I'll go and look for a spring."

He called the animals into the adjoining copse, and Medhurst could hear him talking to them and to himself until they had penetrated so far into the woods they were out of reach of his ears. When they reëmerged the dogs were in the freshest spirits, and Rodney was laughing over their exploits. The truth was, he felt singularly nervous, and it was easier to beat about the bush and make more talk than to go straight at the subject. He now began

to talk about himself, giving a recital of his doings for the past ten years, interrupted by frequent digressions, for the sake of eliciting some opinion from Medhurst, who, nevertheless, offered neither comment nor admonition. Rodney seemed to have been questioning his conscience and putting himself on trial. He was not inclined to pass the sponge over his faults, but he was tired of committing them, he declared, and wanted to do no more foolish things. He longed now to dismiss crude illusions, and see life as it really was; he wanted, in fact, a reasonable existence for the rest of his days, marked by duties, and definitely guided by routine.

At this point Rodney paused and glanced at Medhurst, who answered his look calmly, and said: —

"You wish to marry."

"I see you understand me."

"I understand you admirably. You are going to marry. You have chosen Miss Haxtoun for your wife, and have every wish to accept the altered conditions of the future."

Rodney laughed.

"You believe me to be engaged to her?"

"I assuredly do."

"Do you wonder that for days I have been half out of my senses with joy? I find, to my surprise, that I am brimming over with sentiment. If I see anything I wish to myself she were seeing it with me; if I hear anything I fix it in my mind to repeat to her. Upon my word I should be perfectly happy, so it seems to me now, if I could settle down here for the rest of my life with her. I have never been domestic; but now all I long for

is to have a home and a wife. But that is hardly fair to Cecil. I shall take her abroad for a time, doubtless. In fact, there is no limit to the things I intend to do for her."

"Naturally," Medhurst exerted himself to say. He was, he believed, well schooled by this time. He wanted to say more. The subject of what a man situated like Heriot could do for the girl he loved was a large one, and it loomed before him. But when he tried to add some suggestion of this, something bitter and terrible flashed across his consciousness and smote him: what he uttered was not unlike a sob; at least it was a sound which shuddered out of an unbearable pain.

Rodney started up as if confronted by a spectre.

"Is it so then?" he asked, in a bitter, peremptory tone.

"It is so," answered Medhurst. "But do not be alarmed. I am not altogether the weak fool I seem to be."

"But you care for her? Confess it!"

"Is it worth while to press that point?"

"Yes. I want the truth, and I want it from you."

"I do care for her."

"Since when?"

"I cannot tell you. I do not know it myself."

"But, before you confessed to yourself that you were attracted by her, did you not know that I was her suitor?"

"I did."

"I meant to make it clear to you. I trusted you."

"Heriot, this is bitter, bitter!"

"I trusted you, I say. I was now and then inclined to be jealous of you, — you are younger than I."

"I despise myself."

"But why — why" —

"Why did I permit myself to care for her?" said Medhurst, every moment more and more agitated. "How could it matter what I cared for her? What happened was this. There was a day when I fastened on the idea that you were over your fancy for her; that you were in love with a different woman."

"You make that your apology?"

"Call it my apology, — my apology for dishonorable conduct, if you will. Heriot, whether you believe it or not, I am conscious that I have played a miserable part here."

"How miserable, how unjustifiable, you don't know," cried Rodney, his voice piercing and his eyes aflame. "You are young, — you have the world before you. If she loves you what else remains to me? — it was my one chance."

"Your one chance?"

"It was like the poor man's little ewe-lamb."

This outbreak seemed not unlike a pointless jest; but the extraordinary bitterness of Rodney's tone showed that he was in earnest.

"I the rich man!" exclaimed Medhurst, with an air of bewilderment and incredulity. "I taking away the poor man's one little ewe-lamb!"

"Yes," declared Rodney. "I am well past

thirty-six, — no longer young, hopeful, or strong, and I am tired of these persistent failures."

"These persistent failures," repeated Medhurst, once more.

"I was so happy," Rodney went on. "I felt like the good woman in the gospel, who was so enchanted to find her lost penny. I have always wanted to love somebody; but I have loved few people, and nobody has ever loved me. A man needs to be loved a little, in order to feel sure of himself — to believe in himself."

"And have I robbed you?" asked Medhurst, meditatively.

"When I heard that you had come between me and Cecil" —

"Who told you?"

"No matter, — I heard it. I said to myself that I would kill you. But, at the very moment I was registering that vow, I came across Snow, who was boiling over with rage against you, and he put me out of conceit with any idea of vengeance."

Medhurst had risen, and was pacing to and fro, while Rodney still lay stretched at his full length on the turf, propping up his chin with his hands.

"Have you seen her to-day?" he now asked.

"Yes," said Medhurst, coldly.

The other was on his feet in a moment, and sprang at Medhurst like a panther, clutching at him and shaking him powerfully. But Medhurst, though taken by surprise, was not thrown down. Once on his guard he was more than Rodney's match, and, watching for his opportunity, presently, by a dexterous movement, caught

his opponent's wrists, and held them like a vice, then flung him back, and stood looking into his face.

"This is a foolish business," said he. "You are behaving childishly, Heriot. Besides, you have no call for anger. Sit down and listen to me."

Rodney was blushing with shame and vexation. He was conscious of his own inconsistency. His impression concerning Medhurst shifted every moment. There was no consecutiveness in his ideas: by turns he had a vision of self-renunciation, and was inspired by a resolution to give up nothing. Finally, in a moment of blind, jealous rage, he had committed himself to violence, and now felt the smart of remorse for it.

"Let us talk coolly as man to man a moment," said Medhurst. "You asked if I had seen Miss Haxtoun to-day. I will tell you what happened at our interview. She told me then, and for the first time, that she was engaged to you."

Rodney sat on the ground, bending over and pulling nervously at tufts of grass. He now lifted his dilated, feverishly brilliant eyes, fixed them on Medhurst, and seemed waiting to hear more.

"She is very young — very inexperienced," Medhurst went on, speaking with some difficulty. "I fancy she — she pitied me, and for a time — There are feelings which gather force and concentration from being forbidden. I advise you to give her a little time. Show her the best half of yourself. I do not see why all her heart should not go out to a man like you."

Rodney jumped up; he stretched out his hands.

"Oh, you are generous!" he exclaimed.

"No, I am not generous," said Medhurst; "but I think of her, and only of her. What compensation is there for a woman who makes a mistake in marriage?"

"Do you mean to say you resign her?"

"I am going away."

"Actually?"

"Do not hurry her," said Medhurst, who was impatient with him for seeming to doubt that there was any other sequence except instant going away after his energetic resolution to play a man's part in the emergency. "She will soon forget me."

"And shall you forget her?" asked Rodney, abruptly.

"I don't know."

"You seem to me to be violently breaking your life in two."

"All motive has gone from me except to get away and at once," said Medhurst.

Rodney did not speak, but continued to gaze at him.

"Good-by," said Medhurst. He lost no time. He did not even touch the other's extended hand, and, without once looking back, strode down the hill, leaped the fence, and vanished into the wood.

Left to himself, Rodney Heriot settled back into a comfortable position on the grass.

"Now that is a good thing," he observed, aloud. "Medhurst is a sensible fellow."

But, although he thus summed up the burden of his thoughts, they were far from all taking the same logical direction. An internal debate went on, in

which he took first one side and then the other. His feelings rushed with an impetuous current towards Cecil; but all the time his wavering consciousness was strongly impressed by Medhurst. He recoiled from the idea that the young girl's belief and love were to be disappointed. Many precious things are broken with the breaking of illusions. His indignation against Medhurst revived, and he felt irritated with him, not only for raising his eyes to Cecil, but for winning upon his own sympathies. But, after all, there are certain laws a man is bound to obey, and Medhurst ought not to have thought of his patron's daughter at all. Still, now he had apparently played his part and vanished into shadow. He had solved the problem in a way that seemed to him very simple, and had gone away. Rodney was acting after his usual precedents, and obeying his adopted maxims in gaining all the advantages he could from the situation. "Take the goods the gods provide," was familiar to his heart and lips, and if other thoughts, aspirations, and ideas had their echo in his mind and soul he had rarely used them as a rule of life. Both the words Medhurst had uttered, and those which had burned in his eyes and remained unspoken, had the power of shaking Rodney. He felt an almost inexplicable tenderness and fellow-feeling for the young man. He began to make schemes for helping him. He did not want him to struggle on, and finally fall in utter darkness. The thought of insuring him some sort of material success became more and more pleasant to him. With a good place, where he might reap the advantages of the world's wealth and civilization, his failures would be cancelled and his

scarred sensibilities healed. This longing to do something for Medhurst was a reaction against stabs of bitter self-reproach. With that young man comfortably provided for, Rodney felt that his own happiness would be insured. He wanted to dismiss him from his mind, and yield himself up to the exquisite, indefinite sensations of happiness and hope.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LOST OPPORTUNITY.

TOWARDS sunset Rodney walked across the Haxtouns' lawn, and joined the group on the piazza, where the family was assembled. Mr. Haxtoun had experienced an earthquake that day, and his universe was still shattered.

"Do you know what has happened?" he asked Rodney, in a hollow voice, as he came up the steps. "My secretary has left me."

"He told me he was going," the visitor replied, going up to Cecil, and taking her lifeless hand in his. "I suppose you will miss him. But I hope the loss is not irreparable."

Cecil had not yet raised her eyes.

"Bitterly irreparable," said Mr. Haxtoun. "At my age, in my state of health, it is a death-blow. He promises faithfully to send some competent person within a week to assist me, but I feel that he is too sanguine. I see myself dying, like Buckle, with my immortal work unachieved, saying, 'My book, my book,—I cannot finish my book!'"

"Oh, my dear," said Mrs. Haxtoun, "do not suggest anything so painful. Mr. Medhurst may have been an admirable secretary; but, after all, no one person enjoys a monopoly of all talents and all

virtues. And then you know it was very much to Mr. Medhurst's advantage to go away."

"To his advantage?" said Rodney, eagerly. "How was that?"

"The editor of the 'Forum' is going to Europe and the East for a year, and Mr. Medhurst is to take his place."

"Ah, indeed!" Rodney observed, with some suggestion of meaning behind his words; "he is luckier than I supposed. He always roused my sympathy for his deprivation of the prizes of life, yet fate seemed to be always knocking at his door with just what he wanted."

Mr. Haxtoun was ready to go on with his lament, but his wife was of opinion that quite enough had been said concerning the young man. She began to talk about Mrs. Dalton, who had called that day to say good-by, and had announced her departure for Newport on the morrow.

"Yes," said Rodney, "she is tired of us. She abhors the trivial waste which goes on in quiet life, and likes to reserve herself for grand occasions. The play gave her something to do; but now that it is over she would find us very flat and dreary."

"I thought," said Mrs. Haxtoun, with a little nod, "that Mr. Medhurst's departure might have precipitated hers."

Rodney could not forbear glancing at Cecil. He hardly knew whether it promised well or ill for him that whatever had happened between Medhurst and the young girl was unknown to the mother.

"I do not think," he remarked languidly, "that much of the old passion had survived their six years'

separation. He was very young when he knew her formerly,— he probably understands her better now than he did then."

"It would seem," put in Alec, with some pique, "that you consider a mature judgment"—

"Don't impute any considerations to me, I beg," said Rodney. "Any man of any age may admire a pretty woman."

"I shall see Mrs. Dalton in Newport next week," pursued Alec. "I am to be at my uncle's for a month."

"Happy man!" said Rodney. He rose and approached Cecil.

"Come and walk down to the river-bank with me," he said.

She obeyed him on the instant. She seemed to have expected — to have been waiting for the summons. Mrs. Haxtoun hung about her daughter with a pretty solicitude as she crossed the piazza, and gave Rodney a shawl in which to wrap his charge if the river breeze blew.

"Your mother knows how I love to take care of you," he said to Cecil, as they descended the first terrace. "You seem to me like a tender little child, whose unused feet must touch no rough place in the world."

She looked up at him with a trembling smile. He saw that she had grown pale since she came out, that even her lips had lost their color, and he spoke no more until they had descended the last of the long line of terraces.

"I was glad you asked me to come out," she said

then, with a curious sort of composure. "I wanted to see you alone. I have something to tell you."

He looked at her with a troubled glance.

"Is it anything you want me to forgive?" he asked.

"It is something I must confess."

"Let it be as if the confession were made," said he, rallying his spirits, and speaking with his light, airy charm of manner. "I forgive it if it be a sin against me, — I forgive it freely; for I might myself confess a thousand sins, did it not seem better to let them all go into the past, and to begin again. I will have no sins against you in the future, Cecil; not one. And, as for you, I will give you no chance to have sins against me."

Something in his words stung her. Her eyes drooped a little. She flung out her hands impetuously.

"Oh," she said, with a half-sob, "I wish you could look into my heart for one moment!"

"I do look into your heart. I know it better than you think. You do not quite love me yet, — but then, you do not hate me."

He held her hands in his and looked down into her face. Encountering his gaze in this way, she experienced the effect of some bond between them. It seemed impossible to question his authority over her.

"Do you not want me to be true — to be honest?" she asked him, almost the more determined to show no sign of submission because she felt that she must submit.

"You are true; you are honest."

"Do not say that, when I want you to despise me."

"Ah, little one!" he looked at her steadily, — "I only want you to tell me one thing, — that you are mine."

She looked at him with a sort of despair.

"Will you have me with falsehoods, with a secret, with a ceaseless pain that breaks my heart? All day long I have not known where to turn nor whom to confide in, until at last I said to myself, 'I will tell Mr. Heriot everything. He will know what is best for me to do.'"

Her trouble rushed over her with overwhelming force. An impulse of terror had come upon her; she had seen her fault in a new, awful, sharply defined aspect. She was afraid to trust herself; she dreaded her blind choice. She longed to tell everything that was in her heart, and it had seemed to her that Rodney Heriot might be ready to listen with sympathy, if not with indulgence. But, met by his persistent negation, her visionary impulse seemed lost. Her familiar little world of father, mother, brother, and cousin had changed its aspect for her. There seemed no use in any appeal to them. Her mother had crushed her with her sweetness, her disdain, her scepticism of the worth of her feelings and impulses, and to the others she had no heart to turn. She had been compelled to define for herself the meaning of the vague, impalpable thoughts that floated in her mind, and make actual shapes for the hurrying and crowded images that loomed before her. But the experience was disciplining her to truth, to duty, to a feeling which put the

happiness of the rest of the world before her own. The strange yearning of heart she had been moved by towards Medhurst; the sudden revelation that he loved her, that the glimpse of her feelings had opened heaven to him, — all these had given her a rapture which not even her half belief in the fatality that kept them apart could smother. But the clearer insight which had come with her realization of what love might mean had shown her fault towards Rodney Heriot.

"Let me tell you everything," she said, pleadingly. "I have done wrong, and it has been you to whom I have done wrong."

Rodney felt all his joy flatly depart.

"Come and sit down," said he. "If I am to hear it, let me hear it at once. I wish you would be content not to tell me."

He led her to one of the garden-seats along the terrace path. Cecil sat down, dizzy with the whirl of her thoughts, turning to him in her need, longing for some fact to grasp.

He sat down close beside her.

"Cecil," he began at once, "here you are, almost within the circle of my arms, — close by my heart. You cannot tell me anything to pain me, — I am sure you cannot. For days now I have carried the belief that you are to be my wife. Promise me that."

He looked at her, but she said nothing, only bent her head lower on her breast.

"Perhaps I could have borne it the other day to be refused," said he; "but I cannot bear it now. My heart has filled with love towards you since I spoke, as the brooks fill with floods in spring."

Cecil looked up at him as if dazzled.

"I see," she cried, in a tone of despair; "I see it all. I was weak, — I was wicked, — and now I shall have to suffer all my life. I told mamma, — she knew, — but how was I to tell you that day? I hardly dared say it to myself at that time."

Rodney felt all his ideas stiffen into wintry rigidity.

"Tell me frankly now," said he. "Go on, — tell everything."

"Mamma wanted me to marry you," she said, almost as if talking in her sleep. "And how could I say then that I wanted to marry somebody else?"

"Medhurst?"

She nodded, the tears rushing to her eyes.

"He had not asked you then?"

"No, not then."

"But he has since?"

She said nothing, and he, too, was silent. Presently she took heart and went on: —

"I knew that I was wrong. I needed a friend, but I had no friend to go to. And when mamma planned it all, I could not presumptuously say, 'I will not have it so.' What I said within my own heart was, 'Something will happen, — something must happen.' Even when you were speaking to me that day, as we walked up the glen, I kept pushing away the real facts, and making believe they were meaningless things, which ended with your words, and would be forgotten like other little phrases. And all that day and the next my heart was so heavy, or else it was so strangely light. I felt either in a nightmare or seemed to float in the

clouds. All the voices I heard sounded far off, — they did not address me — until — until Mr. Medhurst spoke. And when he told me last night he was going away — I — You see it settled everything for me."

"Tell me just what happened. Let me know so much."

Cecil did not analyze the meaning of the scorn and the passion in his voice. She obeyed him, speaking hurriedly, and in a voice barely above a whisper: —

"I can only remember that he said he was going away. And then I felt as if everything was vanishing. It was as if I were drowning, — I reached out for help. I did not think at all except that I could not bear it. I did not remember you in that moment; it never occurred to me that I was untrue — I simply"—

"Did he — did he kiss you?" Rodney asked, in a voice no one would have recognized as his own. But he did not wait for her answer, but said recklessly: —

"Tell me what happened when you met this morning."

She had forgotten all except her own trouble now, and, counting on help from some one, believed it would come from Rodney. She looked up at him with the tears running down her face.

"He had already begun to doubt that he had a right to speak to me," she said. "He declared he was too poor — not well enough placed in the world — to ask me to marry him."

"And what reply did you make to that?"

"That I was not so very poor, that I had some money, all my own, that grandmamma left me."

"Ah, and that comforted him?"

"It made him angry, rather. He would have sent me away, but when he saw it broke my heart, he said" — her voice sank — "he could give up the woman he loved, but not the woman who loved him."

"Ah!" burst from Rodney.

"But I had not then confessed," she now exclaimed, with all the bitterness of despair, "that I was in any way bound to you: when he heard that, it was as if a gulf opened between us. He went away at once."

It was a hard moment for Rodney. As he had told her, here she was, almost within the circle of his arms; she almost touched his heart, which beat with quick, furious throbs. And why not clasp her there, and hold her, teach her a new creed, give her a new faith? The opportunity was his; all he needed was the courage to take it. And his love was, in a measure, of the clinging, unreasoning, passionate sort, which would make a half-resistance from her piquant and sweet. But he wanted her love; a half-happiness, which brought a poignant pain with it, might be the chief of calamities.

"What is it," he cried, "that hinders you from loving me?" He laughed slightly. "Is it the years between us? Tell me how Medhurst tricked your heart away."

"I don't know," she said, impetuously. "From the first he was like nobody else to me. And then — I hate things that are made too easy. I long for

something actual, something difficult. I would choose, above all others I would choose, a life in which I renounced something, — denied myself something. I like better what is hard and painful than what a rich, prosperous life would give me." She broke off, growing scarlet. Rodney had started to his feet as if stung. "Forgive me, forgive me, Mr. Heriot," she said, humbly.

"I haven't much vanity," he exclaimed, "and it is not hurt. I am almost glad you did not count in my mother's income, and old Esté's pictures and wood-carvings." He sat down again on the edge of the bench, irresolute. "I have said it before," he remarked, after a time, in a tone of absolute conviction, — "no woman ever loved me. I don't win love."

He wondered what he had better say or do, but he seemed to have neither logic, reason, nor will. All his energy was paralyzed. He remembered that Medhurst had bade him have patience, and not hurry the young girl. But at this moment he was eager only to have done with the whole experience, to forget it, and have it well blurred over in the past. Had there been more solemnity about his mood he might have declared that his heart was broken, for he felt as if something was shattered within him. But he could not rally to the point of calling his emotions by a name. His mind fastened on certain past episodes of his life, in which, at the crowning moment, what seemed within his grasp had melted away. There was always some reason why he could not succeed, let it be in act or intention, love or hate. The moment he measured his dreams against realities they grew unlifelike,

monstrous. But the conviction of his lack of fervid belief, of his weakness, of his incompetence, hurt him cruelly. This dream had been the sweetest of his life; with all his heart he longed to have it come to pass.

"No, I don't win love," he said again. "I have not won yours; more's the pity, for I want you for my wife. I want nothing else, — nothing in the world. The desire did not come all at once, but now that it is here it clutches me like a giant."

He turned towards her, then recoiled with a sharp, swift quiver of the heart. "She does not half-know how I love her," he said within himself, "and she does not care to know." His eyes rested on the fair, young face. He remembered that Medhurst had kissed her . . . The cup must be drunk to the dregs, and it was full, full, brimming over. "If I could only be done with it," he thought; "if I could throw myself into a gulf, and so escape it."

"You know I like Medhurst, — I liked him all the time," he said aloud; "and I grudge him no good-fortune except this."

Cecil had commanded herself hitherto.

"But this is not good-fortune," said she, with a little sob. "I cannot help saying to myself, that all is over between him and me before it has really begun."

Rodney caught her hand.

"I can't have you unhappy," he said. "Others must bear it, — no matter how. Despair is not for you."

He was afraid to stay longer with her, lest he should promise too much.

"How dark it grows!" he said, after a little pause. "I must take you in."

CHAPTER XXVI.

CECIL COMES UP TO TOWN.

ONE day early in October, Medhurst, who had for six weeks been immured in editorial life again, received a note from Mrs. Dalton, asking him to call upon her, in his first moment of leisure, at the "Parthenia," where she had taken a suite of rooms for the winter. Medhurst, who since he left Rosendale had heard not a word of the group of people with whom he had been more or less intimately thrown for three months, at once sent a reply, fixing the next morning for his visit, and on the ensuing day took his way up-town with a promptness which may or may not have been a tribute to Mrs. Dalton. She, at least, was flattered by his promptness.

"You were the first person I thought of in coming back to New York," she said, running towards him and extending her hands to him; "although I have a thousand things to do, a thousand preparations to make. Even now I ought to be with my tailor, but I was so enchanted at the idea of seeing you I put him off. Do you know that I am coming out at Garrick's, the twenty-third of October?"

"I had heard not a whisper of it."

"It was hurriedly decided on a week ago. Mr.

Stein came all the way to Newport to make the engagement. Miss Rutherford, the leading lady, fell ill, and cannot be back for weeks, perhaps months."

She entered at once into the subject of her *début;* told the amount of her salary, her requirements, her perquisites, her impressions of her fellow-actors, and her own success in the rehearsals. She evidently took a practical, and not an exaggerated, view of her prospects. Her ambition was temperate; her demands not peremptory.

"It is good for me to be under orders," she finally observed. "Nothing humanizes one so much as having fixed duties and a fixed salary. One finds one's self a part of the working force of the world, and one understands the movements and meanings of the rest of the machinery better."

"Very likely," said Medhurst, "if one has time for those large views. I have generally been obliged to feel myself a mere spoke in the wheel, and my observation is limited to its revolutions."

For the first time Mrs. Dalton looked at her visitor. Up to the present moment she had been so utterly engrossed in her own story she had merely thought of him as an audience.

"What are you doing nowadays?" she asked. "I was so surprised to hear that you left Rosendale the day before I went to Newport. Nobody told me at the time that you were gone for good, but, later, Mrs. Esté mentioned the fact in her letters."

"I was sent for. Mr. Hill telegraphed to ask if I could take his position for a few months, and I came to New York at once. I accepted the place.

My first duty was to look up a secretary for Mr. Haxtoun, whom I had left in the lurch."

"Did you succeed?"

"Oh, yes; the old gentleman has forgotten even to regret me."

"And how are you doing?"

"Very well, I believe."

"Are you making money?"

"No vast amount."

"You look older, more decided, more in earnest," declared Fanny, throwing a good deal of expression into her fine eyes.

Medhurst waived these personal considerations. He told Mrs. Dalton that he was in a position to advance her in her new career, and he would help her to the extent of his ability. She was glad to return to the subject of her own profession. She was interested in all its cliques, mysteries, intrigues. She caught eagerly at all the guild-secrets, and were anxious to propitiate the ruling powers. There was a display of experience, and a freedom from illusion in her estimate of things, which seemed to promise success. She already believed that fascination of the public rested on clever trickery, and that the critics could cajole them into almost any views. This may have been interesting to Medhurst, but he had only an hour to spend with her, and he had not yet heard a word of what he had come to learn. It was not until he rose to take leave that he had a chance to ask: —

"What have you heard from Rodney Heriot?"

Fanny's mobile face changed slightly.

"I believe he is going abroad."

"They, I suppose you mean. His wedding comes off this autumn, no doubt."

"Wedding! I have heard of no wedding. If you allude to the idea some people entertained that he wanted to marry Miss Haxtoun, I assure you there was nothing in it. Don't you remember my telling you that he would never marry her? Mrs. Esté wrote me that he tried to make up his mind to it, but found out that he was too old. It was a mere midsummer madness. He had lived for himself too long, — he could not pick up handkerchiefs and offer bouquets of roses like younger men. The thing bored him. He declares that he is devoted to his mamma, and only to her. He wants her to go to Paris with him. Poor old lady! How tired she is of the world, and yet how much she has got in it! By the way, Frank" — Mrs. Dalton did not go on. She was about to ask some rankling question concerning his infatuation of two months ago; but, observing the gleam in his eye, she laughed softly, looking at him, remained silent a moment, then made him promise to return soon, and in parting gave him the smile which was soon to charm all the town.

On the journey back to his office Medhurst gave himself up to thoughts he had lately checked and controlled. He had interpreted the heavy silence between himself and Rosendale as a confirmation of his belief that everything there was moving on in its appointed way; that his absence had left no blank. Coerced to bear his pain, it had finally given him strength. He had found more than enough to do. This was a friendly chance to show him his

own powers, and he had determined to profit by it. He had learned more than one lesson in life of late. He no longer estimated himself beyond his true worth. His imagination had hitherto misled him a little, and, after sounding his imperfections with it until they were virtues, it now made his fault blacker than it was. He had thought of Heriot with a stinging sense of his own unfaithfulness, while he believed him to be reinstated with Cecil, and when now he entered his room and found Heriot sitting in his chair, he was seized with a feeling of surprise, doubt, and contrition almost overwhelming.

"I — I was just thinking of you!" he exclaimed, stopping short, and staring at his visitor.

Rodney had sprung to his feet.

"Nevertheless, you look at me as if I were the last man in the world you wanted to see," he said. "Now, I fancied that, by this time, you would be hankering after my society."

"Don't mind my looks. I am glad to see you. I have just this moment come from Mrs. Dalton, who spoke of you."

Rodney gave Medhurst a keen glance.

"Are you in her meshes again?"

"Hardly, — so far, at any rate. She invited me to call, and I gratefully complied. I knew nothing of her, — in fact, I knew nothing of any one. We talked chiefly of her prospects; she told me she is going on the stage."

"Yes, my mother heard from her that she had secured a very good engagement. I fancy she will succeed very well. She likes sensation, and she likes applause; and she is likely to gain both. I

don't blame her for wanting to put something into her life. She has not much heart, so she cannot solace herself by falling in love; and she is frightfully discreet, so that she will not give herself away by being fallen in love with. Life becomes tame to a clever woman like that. Nothing would induce me to be a woman. We all expend our force on trivialities, but they expend theirs on such dull trivialities. Did you never see a group of half-a-dozen women, arch, brilliant, mutinous, discussing some subject in secret conclave with such avidity that you long to know what it is, believing the topic to be something racy, wicked, delicious? Depend upon it, they are talking about nothing more than whether their petticoats are to be scant or full next season, flat at the hips or *bouffant*. They are dreadfully restricted."

Under the sedative of Rodney's easy commonplaces Medhurst had regained his composure, and now drew a chair opposite his visitor and sat down.

"Are you staying in town?" he inquired.

"Yes, we came up yesterday. We have decided to spend the winter in New York."

"Tell me how it is that you are not going to be married?" Medhurst said, in a low voice, going straight to the matter which most concerned them both without preamble.

They looked at each other, first pale, then simultaneously beginning to redden.

"I don't think you need information on that point,—you of all men," said Rodney, rather dryly. He seemed disinclined to say more, but presently added, "Make your mind easy,—I am not to marry

Miss Haxtoun. You see I don't fatigue myself carrying about the same ideas month after month and year after year. To-day my happiness seems at stake, but to-morrow I find out that I still live, although happiness no longer exists for me. Sensations, repugnances, sympathies, hopes and fears, come and go, mix and merge into each other. Last March I resented the idea that anybody wished me to marry. But then the notion of marriage grew less strange, until 'seen too oft, familiar with its face, I first endured, then pitied, then embraced.' That is, I almost embraced it, — I would if I could, but at the critical moment" — Rodney broke off abruptly and stared at the ceiling. "How do you get on?" he asked, without change of voice.

"I am doing very well. At least I am a busy man."

"I shan't take up your time," said Rodney. "I called simply to ask you to drive with me to-day. I shall take no excuse. I will call for you."

It had not been convenient for Medhurst to accept the invitation, but his objections had been overruled, and by half-past four that afternoon the two entered the park. Rodney Heriot was in a rapid, brilliant, and excited mood, and he had been talking incessantly ever since they set out. The spell of confession was on him, and he had been telling Medhurst about the past six weeks in the country. He had seen a great deal of Cecil, although their tacit engagement had long since ended. Once free of him as a lover he declared that the young girl had liked him exceedingly.

"I had exceptional opportunities for falling deeper and deeper in love with her," Rodney went on, "but I did not use them; on the contrary, I exerted myself to extricate my feelings from their entanglement. I cured my passion by talking to her about you. Although I like you very well as a friend, Medhurst, I did not enjoy such a monopoly of you as the young lady gave me. I prefer to find my own reflection in a woman's eyes."

"I don't in the least understand you."

"Unluckily I have no time to make my whole meaning clear. I hope you are grateful to me,—but who is grateful in this world? Besides what I have sacrificed, what I have resigned, nobody will ever quite know. You have found your fitting opportunity, and have shown your own powers, and I shall be quite forgotten."

The two faces were lit up, each with a different emotion, each with an absolutely opposite train of ideas. Yet the men understood each other. In a different way each had had something of the same struggle. Rodney had been driving his spirited horses rapidly, but now paused a little beyond the bridge, and seemed to be waiting for some one. The scene was full of charm, if Medhurst had not been dumb, deaf, and blind. The tints of red and yellow had mellowed and made various the green of the past summer. Many of the leaves had fluttered down in the September storms, and the thinned foliage opened lovely vistas into bridle-paths and pleasure-walks on every hand.

While Medhurst was trying to speak, and utter something of the conflict of feeling going on

within him, a low, luxurious carriage, with the best appointments, stopped close beside them.

"That is my mother, Medhurst," observed Rodney. "Suppose you get out and speak to her."

The younger man obeyed with some pleased surprise, took off his hat, and went up to Mrs. Esté, who made a marvellous picture in her bronze velvet, with a tiger-skin drawn over her knees.

"O you naughty, naughty man! — to run away from us last summer," she began at once, waving her parasol at him with little, coquettish advances, which he was compelled to parry. "How do you think poor Fanny felt? I fancy your desertion was what drove her to go on the stage. Shall you go to see her the first night? She has sent for me to come and see her clothes. She wants to make me envious. Oh, these actresses, what clothes they can have! They are not compelled to use our little economies."

"You block the way, mamma," cried Rodney, impatiently.

"Ah, yes, yes! Dear Mr. Medhurst, there is a little girl, a guest of mine, driving with me, and as she is inclined to romance, I let her go wandering into the Ramble. She is probably by this time sitting on a bench under the trellis; and will you go to her, and say that I will take three turns, and then come back for her?"

"At your orders," said Medhurst, starting at once. He glanced back at Rodney, to see if he had heard his mother's command, and Rodney waved his hand, laughed, and drove on. The carriage, too, had rolled away. Medhurst was

startled by a half-hope he tried to push away. Could it be — could it be? Certainly a voice seemed calling him from those picturesque labyrinths. Quite blindly, like one in a dream, he went on. How was he to find the place Mrs. Esté had so vaguely indicated, and if — if this tingle of joy which ran through him came from a misleading fancy, how was he to bear it? But the uncertainty lasted but for a moment. It would have been easy to mistake the way, but an unerring instinct had led him on.

"You — you here?" he said softly, going up to a young girl who was loitering along the path, and had not yet reached the bench under the trellis.

Cecil had heard some one's step along the gravel-walk. She had not turned to see who was coming, but yet the sound of a hasty stride behind her had thrilled and half-frightened her. It was not that she expected to see Medhurst; still, now that she was in New York, she might happen to see him. But at the sound of his voice she turned, lifting up her great, soft eyes, the color on her cheeks kindling, then fading to return and deepen.

"Did you know I was coming?" he asked again.

"No — no," said Cecil, in a foolish, trembling, little voice. "Mrs. Esté would insist that I should come walking here by myself — She said she would send for me; but I thought" —

"What did you think, pray?"

They were looking into each other's eyes. His look was fond, secure, and proud. "What did you think?" he insisted.

"That she would send the footman for me."

"Are you disappointed?" said Medhurst, and they both laughed a little. Medhurst bent down, and took the little gloved hand hanging at her side.

"Is it my little Cecil?" he asked, with a thrill of delight, which lit up his face with loyalty and devotion.

"I am spending a day with Mrs. Esté," Cecil said, quite inappositely. "I came to town with her, but shall go to our cousin's to-morrow, with papa and mamma, who are on their way here. Papa's errand is to find a publisher for his first volume. The new secretary has been very swift and satisfactory."

"I am glad of that."

"Even mamma likes him," declared Cecil.

"I see — I see," cried Medhurst; "I have not been missed!"

They had been walking on and on, and had now reached the top of a little hill.

"Cecil," said Medhurst, turning to her and putting his hand on her shoulder, "look up at me."

She looked up. It was too real to her, too vivid, too overwhelming. The tears came to her eyes and the lids drooped over them.

"Heriot was generous," Medhurst said, softly. "I thought he would use his advantages."

Cecil said nothing.

"If you are not his, you shall be mine," Medhurst went on.

There came a little, fluttering half-smile on Cecil's lips.

"Can you — can you forgive me?" Medhurst asked.

"What is there to forgive?"

It was easier for her than for Medhurst to claim her happiness and take it in. Here was what she had longed for close to her, kind, strong, dear, not to be lost again. Her drifting dreams and fancies had parted like the mists of dawn, and here was the reality. Medhurst, on the other hand, could realize, with terrible distinctness, the vast meaning and moment of this change to him. He felt humbled and awed by the great happiness which was coming to him. But yet it seemed familiar and natural that he should be standing there with Cecil, and yet there was undreamed-of eloquence and suggestiveness in it. There was nobody to see, he said to himself, and he yielded to the temptation, and, leaning forward, kissed the young girl on her lips.

But some one saw, and it was Rodney Heriot. Mrs. Esté was waiting, he had come to say; it was growing cooler, and she wanted to go home at once, and Cecil must join her. When he approached the two he was very pale. He looked from one to the other and smiled. Cecil's sweet face was wet with tears, and Medhurst was grave. With rather an inexplicable impulse Rodney took their two hands, which were clasped, and crushed them between both of his.

"Are you ready to go home, Miss Haxtoun?" he then asked, with high ceremony. "Is this little arrangement concluded?"

But, though he showed a light heart, Rodney Heriot was hating the thorns, dust, and weariness of life which he could not throw off. He realized as truth, by the pain of being compelled, what was false, faith by his unfaith, and the sweet rewards of life by his own chastisements.

FINIS.

Poor Rodney, he was
nobler than I thought
him, why didn't he love
Fanny.

Fanny is a humbug
& Rood & can make
his own happy —
Poor Rodney

LB Je '08

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